

The Chequer Board

RECENT FICTION

THE PYRAMID. *By Warrington Dawson*

I WALKED IN ARDEN. *By Jack Crawford*

THE LAY ANTHONY. *By Joseph Her-
gesheimer*

THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE OF COOMBE.
By Frances Hodgson Burnett

VARIETY. *By Sarah Grand*

BRASS. *By Charles G. Norris*

BILL THE BACHELOR. *By Denis Mackail*

THE HOLY TREE. *By Gerald O'Donovan*

THE HEIR. *By V. Sackville-West*

CAREER. *By Dorothy Kennard*

LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN

21 Bedford Street, W.C.

The Chequer Board

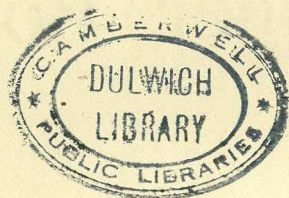
By
Kate Mary Bruce

"'Tis all a chequer board of nights and days
Where destiny with men for pieces plays,
And hither, thither moves, and mates, and slays,
And one by one back in the closet lays."

OMAR KHAYYÁM.



London • William Heinemann



F. 1200

475

LONDON : WILLIAM HEINEMANN, 1922

TO
WILLIAM SOMERSET MAUGHAM

CHAPTER I

OUTSIDE in the streets, wet and slippery under the grey November sky, there hung an atmosphere of half-suppressed excitement. It smouldered in the eyes of the passers-by, walking with a hurried step, as if not altogether sure of their destination, or even aware of their presence in the muddy street. It hovered round their lips, trembled in their voices, murmured in the rumble of the traffic; all London was broad awake, waiting with every sense alert, on the breast of some enormous emotion, which, like an approaching storm, filled the air with heavy, breathless significance.

Inside the great building opposite the Brompton Oratory, across the grey stone walls of which was written in big, red letters "Central Committee for Prisoners of War," the morning was passing as usual. The two large halls on the ground floor were filled with a ceaseless noise, like a railway-station. A vivid scene—the long halls were a blaze of different tints, like a summer garden; the contrasting purples, greens, blues and pinks of the workers' overalls, and the handkerchiefs pinned round their hair to protect it from dust, made a brilliant splash of colour against the multi-

hued paper shavings piled high in wooden cases beside them. Above the clatter of the horses' hoofs on the cobbles outside in the yard, the hoarse shouts of the carters wafting through the open windows, the thud of the heavy boxes as they were thrown down on the tables, the rustling of the packing paper, the rattling of the tinned provisions, shrill and resonant like the incessant gurgle of a noisy brook, rose the chatter of a hundred feminine voices.

Emma felt herself to be the only silent person in the hall; she wished the sad-faced, elderly woman beside her, with a grey moustache, now coated with dust, would cease her plaintive murmur.

"Well, I only hope the poor fellows get their parcels safely," she sighed in Emma's unsympathetic ear, "but I very much fear we are packing for those wicked Germans all the time!"

The head of the department, irritable and worn-out beneath her persistently bright manner, was giving instructions to a new worker, further down the table.

"If you put the cocoa next to the pressed beef, you'll find they'll fit in quite easily, Mrs. Brown," she informed her, patiently. "No, no! you must never have those sharp points sticking up like that . . . they'll pierce through the lid of the box, you see! Oh, but you'll soon learn!"

Emma wished they wouldn't talk so much, for she was listening for something.

Boom—m—m ! Boom—m—m !

"Guns !" exclaimed Emma's neighbour superfluously. "Guns !"

A girl with a round, red face, beaded with perspiration, rushed through the hall, a sardine-tin in one hand and a sickly smelling cake of soap in the other. Large tears were trickling down her nose, but she was utterly oblivious of the fact.

"Have you heard the news ?" she cried breathlessly. "The Armistice was signed at eleven o'clock this morning. The war is over, the war is over !"

She clasped her hands together in her boisterous emotion, and squeezed the soap into a sticky, shapeless mass against the sardine-tin. Emma looked at her wonderingly, hating her for her ugliness.

"Can she possibly have a prospective husband out at the front ?" she asked herself. "Could any man be in love with her ?"

"Everyone is on the roof, come on !" cried the girl, catching Emma by the arm, and pulling her towards the door.

Together they raced along the winding corridors and up the steep stone steps until they reached the flat roof-top, where secretaries, managers, typists and clerks stood jostling one another

to get a better view of the wonderful spectacle. Flags and banners were unfurled on all the shops along the Brompton Road. The people on the buses stood up and waved handkerchiefs, sticks, umbrellas, hats, scarves, anything they could lay hands on, shouting, cheering, singing as they went along.

Emma stood a little apart from the others. Her heavy-lidded blue eyes were full of tears, and the lines of her emotional face were deepened with excitement. Her nose was short, her mouth red and curved; when she smiled her teeth shone regular and white, and there was a certain grace about the soft curve from her chin to her white throat. She was gazing at the Figure on the Brompton Oratory, of the Mother stretching forth her hands to bless and receive the world, and suddenly she wished she were a Roman Catholic; the beautiful symbolical Figure satisfied her dramatic instinct, her intense yearning for something she could not define.

"Mrs. Smith!" Someone tapped her on the arm, and she started out of her reverie. "Someone wishes to speak to you . . . a gentleman . . . he is downstairs waiting!"

"Someone for me?" asked Emma vaguely.

She turned quickly and ran downstairs.

A man? Not Nibs surely? Could it be

Nibs? If so, what fun! Lunch at the Ritz, a matinée . . . dine out and dance somewhere to-night perhaps! But Nibs would surely have let her know; he told her there was no chance of leave for another three weeks. It was probably Alfred—yes, of course! He had got away early from the War Office and had come to take her down to Buckingham Palace. How ripping of him! Yes, she was right—there he was—the dear old thing!

“Hullo, Alfred! isn’t it wonderful! Shall I put on my things and shall we go down to Buckingham Palace?”

Her brother-in-law stood in the middle of the passage, looking very square and burly in his British warm, but his usually red face was singularly pale, his lips dry and unsmiling. Emma stopped dead.

“Is anything wrong, Alfred?” she asked quickly.

He cleared his throat nervously.

“Yes, dear; I am afraid . . .” He stopped and cleared his throat again, loudly and angrily. “I . . . that is . . . look here, Emma, old thing, I’ve got some bad news for you. . . .”

He caught hold of her hand, and Emma gazed up at him with puzzled eyes. No knowledge of what he was trying to tell her had yet dawned on her.

“You must be brave, Emma,” he continued with difficulty. “Nibs . . .”

6 THE CHEQUER BOARD

He flung out the word, and waited. Emma turned a shade paler.

“What has happened?”

“His destroyer was mined on Friday.”

“But . . . Nibs?” asked Emma, still unable to grasp his meaning.

“Nibs . . . poor old chap . . .” His voice broke.

Emma stared at him horror-stricken.

“Is he . . . dead?” she whispered incredulously.

Her brother-in-law nodded silently, and Emma burst into tears. Alfred was deeply relieved. He had heard that people often cannot weep after a shock, and all the way there in the taxi the idea of Emma rocked in stony, speechless agony had terrified him.

“Oh, poor old Nibs!” she sobbed. “How horrible, how horrible! Oh, Alfred—it can’t be true. . . . Say it isn’t true!”

She cried like a child, and her tears rained down on his great coarse hands. He patted her clumsily on the shoulder and envied women their privilege and their power of giving way to their emotions. He had been deeply attached to his brother, and his heart felt as though it were bursting with grief, but he could think of nothing but the most obvious things to say.

"It's true all right," he said gloomily. "Admiralty official. You've got a wire, too, but it was sent to your home first, so mine arrived sooner. Oh, my God! this bloody war!"

"It's unfair! It's cruel! He did so love being alive, and he was so beautiful!" sobbed Emma.

Her brother-in-law gazed down on her with a puzzled expression in his eyes. A straightforward person himself, he did not profess to understand women as a whole, and Emma, especially, was miles beyond his simple fathoming. It was just beginning to dawn on him, however, that breaking the news to his brother's young widow was an easier job than he had expected, and he was remembering a scene of only a week ago when Emma's chow puppy had died of distemper in her arms. She had wept inconsolably then, he recollected—much to the disapproval of his religious, narrow-minded wife, who held the view that it was affected, unnatural, ridiculous to grieve for a departed dog—and through her sobs she had repeated:

"It's so cruel, because he did so love living, and he was so beautiful!"

A chow puppy! It might be absurd of him, of course, but it worried him a little that she should employ the same phrase without the changing of a single word on learning of the death

of her husband! Still, Emma was Emma, an emotional, impulsive, appealing little thing, and he had long realized that it was useless to apply ordinary standards to her. Emma was the unexpected—the undreamed of—the unsuspected!

“Go and put your hat on, dear, and come home,” he said gently. “Mabel will comfort you.”

Emma, docile among her tears, obeyed him without a word.

She and her brother-in-law walked dejectedly out of the building; Alfred hailed a taxi and told the man to drive to his flat in Earl’s Court Road, where Emma had been staying during the past few weeks, waiting for her husband’s leave, long overdue.

As the taxi turned the corner by South Kensington station they narrowly escaped collision with a gaily decorated motor-lorry filled with a party of wounded Tommies all singing at the top of their voices and waving flags and coloured streamers. Emma leaned out of the window and waved to them as they passed.

“The darlings! How happy they look!” she exclaimed, smiling, and her brother-in-law, who had been wondering how she would endure the drive home, through the noisy jubilant crowds, heaved a sigh of relief.

By the time they reached the flat all traces of

tears had almost entirely vanished from Emma's face, and when Mabel advanced with outstretched arms and a shocked, compassionate countenance, she was a little taken aback by the young widow's air of self-possession.

"My poor Emma," she murmured, drawing her gently into her bedroom, and closing the door. "Now you can have your cry out! Don't put a strain on yourself, Emma! You must give way."

Emma walked over to the window and stood looking down on the gay busloads passing to and fro. Then, partly from a feeling of helplessness, and partly from disappointment that she might not participate in the gaiety, she again dissolved into tears and sank wearily down on the bed.

"Poor dear! here is your wire from the Admiralty," said Mabel sympathetically, thrusting the orange-coloured envelope into Emma's limp hand, "wouldn't you like to read it?"

Emma shook her head vehemently.

"Oh, no!" she cried through her tears. "I don't want to see it—please take it away, Mabel!" She tossed the telegram on to the floor and continued weeping.

"Really, Emma is very strange," thought Mabel, as she slowly stooped down and picked it up. "I've always thought she was different to everyone else somehow."

Her critical eye fell on Emma's limp figure, huddled up on the bed.

"You'll have to see about getting some mourning," she said gently.

Emma rose and went over to the mirror. She fluffed out her pretty fair hair, and powdered her nose.

"She doesn't really care," said Mabel to herself. "If she did, she couldn't think of powdering her nose!"

Emma, gazing reflectively in the glass, was wondering how she would look in a widow's veil. She could not help thinking that the black would suit her very well.

"Barker's is cheap, and very good. If you liked, I could order some things to be sent round this afternoon on approval," pursued Mabel, in the persistent, practical tone of voice Emma loathed. "A little black reach-me-down would be nice, or . . ."

Emma turned on her in exasperation.

"Oh, Mabel! can't you leave me alone! How can I think about clothes to-day? And anyway I hate Barker's!"

Mabel sniffed indignantly, and her face grew red and mottled; she had evidently been crying ever since she had received Alfred's telephone message and, as Emma looked at her, she thought

how ugly she looked with swollen eyes and a scarlet nose—ugly and common !

“ No doubt you would like to get your mourning made in Bond Street, my dear,” said Mabel coldly, “ but people of your income must confine their wants to High Street, Kensington !”

She left the room, and Emma returned to the glass and gazed at herself pityingly.

“ I am a widow,” she whispered softly.

On the left of the cheap white dressing-table stood a photograph in a leather case of a young man with a Grecian nose and large wide-open, honest eyes, his hair curling crisply beneath a naval cap. Emma picked it up, and looked at it attentively, with tears gathering in her eyes. It was totally impossible to imagine him dead . . . he had been such an active, noisy, cheerful, clumsy person, so like a Newfoundland puppy in his moods of demonstrative affection—it was hard to picture him for ever silenced and departed, and still harder to think of him as an etherealized being on another plane. Emma remembered, not very clearly, sundry scraps of early religious teaching which had fallen from the lips of her nurses and governesses, according to which it seemed that after death some spiritual part of one’s personality survived and passed to another world. It had never before struck her that Nibs had a soul, and

now, when she tried to conjure up some idea of a spiritual survival of that person whom she had kissed, romped with, and called Nibs, she came upon a very dim, shadowy, unsatisfactory thing, in no way recognizable. It made her feel that Nibs was lost to her for ever, but she did indeed cling to a half-belief that he was still somewhere in existence, even though out of her reach, and she hoped that he was happy and did not feel lonely. In her affectionate reminiscences she half-forgot how profoundly bored she had always been in his society, and when she thought of her honeymoon, which in reality had been three of the longest, emptiest, most uninteresting weeks of her life, it now seemed to her a period of bliss, and the tears ran faster down her cheeks as she pressed the photograph to her lips and thought how cruel was fate, and how young she was to be left a widow, and how poor she would be; that it was Armistice Day, and that she would hate returning to live with her family in the depths of the country.

A gentle tap on the door roused her: she dreaded its being Mabel; it was only Florrie, the shabby little general servant, carrying a tray.

"Mrs. Smith said you was to 'ave lunch in your room," she said, eyeing Emma with some curiosity.

She put the tray down on the small bedroom

table, and Emma saw that her lunch was to consist of boiled mutton, which she particularly disliked. She returned to her position by the window, and a few minutes later Mabel bounced in with her hat on.

"I am just going out, and I thought perhaps you would like me to send off a telegram to your people," she said, struggling into a pair of tight, black kid gloves.

"Oh, thank you; I don't know how you manage to think of everything," said Emma feebly. "It is very kind of you."

"Someone has got to be practical in this world, my dear," said Mabel importantly. "Why haven't you eaten any lunch?"

"I didn't want anything," explained Emma apologetically.

"Nonsense!" cried Mabel. "It was because it was boiled mutton, that's the reason—I know you, and your faddy ways!"

"But if I don't like boiled mutton why should I eat it?" Emma began tearfully.

"There, there! I am sure no one wants to force you to eat, but you must keep up your strength, even in grief, you know."

Emma let her go in silence and heaved a sigh of relief when she heard the door of the flat close to with a bang.

The afternoon wore on tediously, and Emma

grew very hungry. She opened the door cautiously and looked out. A strong smell of boiled mutton and onions pervaded the whole flat, and the children were crying noisily in their poky little nursery, because it was raining and they could not go out.

"You are a naughty boy, Tommy!" she heard the nurse call out, in shrill, angry tones. "Give that toy to your little sister at once or I shall smack you; do you hear what I say?"

Strange scuffling sounds ensued, then the noise of two people slapping one another, followed by renewed yells and indignant protests on the part of the nurse. Emma crept to the kitchen door, and called Florrie very softly. The latter emerged, looking rather tousled, without her cap and apron. She was clasping a paper edition of "Three Weeks" in her hot hand.

"Florrie," murmured Emma, gently persuasive, "I wonder if you would do something for me?"

Florrie nodded vigorously.

"Here is a shilling. Will you . . . could you go . . . that is to say, would you mind running across to the little sweet-shop opposite and getting me a pound of almond rock?"

Florrie showed no surprise.

"I don't mind, seein' it's to oblige you," she said condescendingly.

Emma slipped the shilling into her hand.

"You won't be long?" she whispered, glancing nervously towards the front door.

Florrie grinned.

"That's all right," she said with a wink, jerking her thumb in the direction of Emma's glance. "I'll be off now, and mum's the word!"

Emma tiptoed back to her room, feeling rather guilty, but when five minutes later a sticky paper bag was thrust round the door and a husky whisper announced, "'Alf a pound I got you, mum, and there's no change," she was glad she had had the moral courage to send for it. Sitting down on the bed, she bit joyfully into a large, adhesive slab of toffee filled with nuts. She was surprised to find how hungry she was.

"There's some scraps of cold mutton left, mum," continued the husky whisper outside the door. "Would you like a bit?"

Emma shuddered.

"No, thank you," she said hastily, and as best she could with her mouth full, and the shuffling footsteps receded to the back premises.

Alfred Smith, returning early from the War Office, where he had worked all day, thought he ought to have a business talk with Emma; he made up his mind to ask her if she had yet made any plans for the future. He searched for her first

in the drawing-room, then in his little smoking-room, and finally concluded she must be in her bedroom. He tiptoed to the door, and listened. There was no sound of sobbing such as he had dreaded to hear. He knocked timidly. There was no answer. So, concluding that Emma must be asleep, he pushed open the door very softly, and poked his head round. There on the bed, swinging her legs, sat the young widow, with a sticky-looking paper bag on her lap, bulging cheeks, and wide-open eyes apprehensively turned in his direction.

"Ah! here you are, Emma!" he exclaimed, his eyes riveted on the paper bag. "I wanted to have a little business talk with you. . . ."

Emma blushed scarlet. She could not speak, because her jaws were stuck together with almond rock, and as she jumped off the bed, making absurd and futile gestures, the heavy paper package fell to the ground with a crash. Her brother-in-law picked it up gravely, and handed it back to her without a word. Emma hoped that he had not noticed her bulging cheeks; with a violent effort she managed to extricate her jaws and swallow down the awkward mouthful. She then followed Alfred into his smoking-room, furtively wiping her sticky mouth on her handkerchief, which was still wet with tears.

CHAPTER II

EMMA's father, Nicholas Durville, always boasted that he had been expelled from every public school in England. A tall, thin man, with glowing black eyes that burnt fiercely in his brown parchment-coloured face, he had a strong, restless, rather uncanny personality. One of the most brilliant of all the rising London surgeons, just as he was reaching the summit of his ambition he had the misfortune to lose his health, and was forced to give up his extensive practice and retire to the little golfing village of Crowbridge in Devonshire, in a mood of bitter cynicism. His wife, a hard, practical, matter-of-fact little woman, and his three children, played very little part in his life. He occasionally grumbled at the expense they caused him, and he always laughed when he heard the children had been naughty, observing that it was a pity they had inherited all of their father's evil disposition and none of his brains.

On a certain cold, drizzling November afternoon, Mrs. Durville and Emma's fifteen-year-old sister, Doris, were slowly pacing the little Crowbridge station platform in the gathering dusk, waiting for the London train. Their noses

were red at the tip, for it was very chilly waiting on the unsheltered platform.

"Will Emma be very sad, mother?" inquired Doris nervously.

"Well, I hardly imagine she will be very cheerful, having just lost her husband," retorted Mrs. Durville dryly.

"No, I suppose not. I say . . . mother!"

"Yes?"

"Will Emma be in widow's weeds?"

"Yes, of course; what silly questions you do ask!"

"I was only wondering."

Doris heaved a deep sigh; she felt that a complete stranger must be coming down by the four o'clock train from London. Not Emma—for she could not conjure up a picture she knew wrapped in widow's weeds and deep grief; and as the London train puffed slowly into the little wayside station, Doris was suddenly swamped in a wave of shyness, and crept behind her mother as the latter advanced briskly towards the slim black figure leaping out of a crowded third-class carriage.

"Are you tired, dear?" said Mrs. Durville brightly. "The porter will see to your luggage, so come along, or we shall be late for tea."

The musty leathery smell of the station bus recalled Emma to the days of her childhood, and

as they rattled slowly up the hill crowds of long-forgotten things came rushing back to her.

"Did you have a comfortable journey?" asked her mother, and to Emma, lost in a maze of childish memories, her voice sounded miles away.

"Yes, thank you," she murmured, gazing out of the window at the dripping trees.

And as they jolted along the familiar muddy road, her mind dipped further into the past and a comfortable melancholy enveloped her.

"Stagnation," she kept on saying to herself. "Stagnation."

"The rain is coming in on you, Emma," interrupted her mother. "Put the window up."

Emma obeyed dreamily, and the rain pattered against the window-pane, beating a sad little accompaniment to the rattle of the bus over the stony road. She drowsily counted the drops as they trickled down the glass one after another. One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . . five . . . six. . . .

"Oswald writes to say he has got his football colours," observed Mrs. Durville chattily. "Your father didn't expect him to get them this term."

"Has he?" answered Emma indifferently.

Her eyes were fixed on a solitary raindrop hesitating on the window-pane; it was soon caught up by another, and she watched them trickle

down the blurred glass together. She was not in the least interested in the doings of her small brother, now at a preparatory school at Eastbourne: he was so dull and stolid—and so dirty—and he liked such silly things.

“Here we are!” exclaimed Mrs. Durville. “In capital time for tea.”

Emma jumped out of the cab and walked into the hall, where a damp, earthy smell, mingled with the scent of a log fire and the fumes of paraffin lamps, would have told her where she was, even if every other sense had failed her. Her father’s tall, thin figure advanced out of the gloom, and he welcomed her more warmly than usual. Emma was his favourite child. He drew her to the light of the lamp and scrutinized her keenly.

“Black is very becoming to blondes,” he observed casually, and then he chuckled. “I bet you were thankful to leave the Smiths?”

Emma grinned, and nodded vigorously.

“Tea-time!” called out Mrs. Durville, and Emma followed her father into the drawing-room, where her mother had installed herself behind a silver teapot, looking like an aggressive canary.

“Doris, pass your sister some of Aunt Emma’s shortbread. Wasn’t it kind of Aunt Emma to

remember us, and send us shortbread all the way from Edinburgh?"

"I hate Aunt Emma," observed Emma thoughtfully. "I think I hate her most of all because she has got so many little moles on her chin, with hairs sprouting out of them, and I hate her camphory smell! Why you wanted to go and make her my godmother I can't think! What did she then for me? Nothing, then or since, except to handicap me through life with a perfectly impossible name!"

"You seem to forget, Emma," broke in Mrs. Durville in shocked tones, "that she happens to be your father's sister!"

"Oh, father doesn't mind," said Emma calmly; "he can't bear her himself, can you, father?"

Doris burst into giggles and choked violently.

"Emma ought to have lived in the days of the Borgias," remarked Mr. Durville, as he handed his cup to be refilled, "when she would have been able to give vent to her feelings of passionate dislike towards the poor, the sick, the aged, the afflicted, and the unsuccessful, by hiring servants to poison them quietly at her bidding from time to time."

Emma threw back her head and went off into peals of laughter. She had a most attractive laugh, low and full-throated, like the deeper notes of a thrush's spring song.

"When Emma becomes old or ill herself her views on life may alter," said Mrs. Durville tartly.

"Not they!" replied Nicholas Durville, shaking his head. "Emma will always drift towards sunshine and laughter."

"And why not?" cried Emma, waving a buttered scone in the air. "Is it a crime to love health, and wealth, and youth, and beauty? Oh, how I long to be rich! I want to have sables and pearls and a Rolls Royce, and a dear old ancestral home full of oak and old family portraits, and house-parties; and I want a house in Belgrave Square, and a huge drawing-room full of red lacquer. . . . Oh, just think how wonderful it would be to stand at the top of the stairs in a Paris frock, with ropes of pearls round one's neck and a diamond tiara on one's head, receiving all the lions in London."

"H'm!" grunted her father, "it's lucky you were born with pop-eyes and a double chin, or there is no doubt you would come to a bad end, my dear!"

Emma laughed and jumped up from her chair.

"Come and help me unpack, Doris," she cried, holding out her hand to her younger sister, who sprang to her feet eagerly.

"No; the unpacking can wait," said Mr.

Durville unexpectedly. "I want to have a private and confidential talk with Emma."

Emma followed him into his smoking-room, sticking out her underlip as far as it would go, a habit of hers when annoyed or perplexed. She dreaded a financial talk, which she knew must be depressing, since her conversation with her brother-in-law had acquainted her with the fact that she had nothing to live on but her pension as widow of a naval officer. Her father sank into his comfortable armchair and stretched out his long, thin legs. Emma balanced herself on the arm of the sofa opposite, looking sulky. Mr. Durville put out his hand, which was beautifully shaped, with nervous, clever, surgical fingers, and took up a cigar, which he lit thoughtfully. Then he leaned back in his chair and scrutinized Emma from beneath half-closed lids.

"I believe you've got brains, Emma," he observed lightly. "Not many, but you are certainly the most intelligent of my family. However, no one would ever suspect it to look at you, which is all to your advantage, as men dislike few things as much as a clever woman, and there is only one course open to you now: to marry again, and as well as you can." He gave a few puffs at his cigar. "With that helpless, appealing look of yours I expect you will have no difficulty!

In the meantime I should suggest your taking up some work, as you will never be able to exist on your pension and my allowance of fifty pounds a year. I do not suggest your settling down here, as you and your mother would certainly quarrel, and you would soon grow fat and lose all your looks in the monotony of country life. Nor do I think you would be tempted to throw in your lot with that of the Alfred Smiths in their beastly little flat in Earl's Court—you would never stand that good-natured fool, still less his middle-class wife, and all their squalling children! No, you must find a job, my dear, and you can stay with us till after Christmas while you think it over. Now I want to read, so you can go and leave me in peace."

He waved his hand impatiently towards the door, and Emma had no choice but to walk out of the room like a dismissed schoolgirl. Upstairs she found her sister on her knees beside her trunk, unpacking her clothes for her.

"I've been waiting for you ages!" exclaimed Doris, as Emma entered the room. "What on earth has father been jawing about?"

Emma curled herself up on the foot of the bed, from whence she could just catch a glimpse of herself in the small, cheap mirror over the dressing-table.

"Oh, he has been talking about my future, and how I must earn my own living, and how he expects me to marry again if I play my cards well, and—oh, you know the sort of thing!"

"He sometimes goes on like that to me," said Doris cheerfully. "But I never take any notice of him. I believe he'd like to send me up to London to earn my own living to-morrow, only mother won't let me go—she says I'm useful in the house."

"You always were the domestic daughter. Mother and I always fight if we're long enough together. My goodness, Doris! It must be dull down here; how ever do you stick it?"

Doris knelt down and began to unpack with great care and precision.

"I don't mind it a bit," she replied, laughing happily. "Sometimes it is a bit mouldy, but it's awful fun in the holidays when Oswald comes home."

Emma stuck out her underlip.

"The fact is, you've got a nice, sweet, unselfish, contented nature. You've always been nicer than me; all our nurses and governesses adored you, and they simply detested me! You always gave up your toys to me, and played the games I wanted to play. You never saw the bad side of anybody till I pointed it out to you. You're

one of those people who never want anything they are not supposed to have !”

“ You’re the clever one of the family, you see, Emma,” said Doris, tidily folding up a nightdress and putting it carefully away in a drawer. “ I’m only a country bumpkin, but you were born to become rich and famous. Oswald and I always hoped you’d marry a duke. We were awfully disappointed when you got engaged to Nibs—although, of course . . . ” she added hastily, for fear of hurting her sister’s feelings, “ he was a darling, and awfully handsome.”

Emma thoughtfully traced the pattern on the counterpane.

“ We got engaged a year ago next month,” she said dreamily, “ and we got married last September. And Nibs was killed two months later. Out of that two months we were together three weeks. What a short married life mine has been !” Her voice did not sound regretful, but merely interested. “ Emma Smith is a dreadful name !” she said suddenly, and Doris was so surprised at her change of tone that she dropped Emma’s brushes with a crash. “ Fancy being forced to start life afresh with a name like Emma Smith ! It’s really too hard, and what am I to do, anyway ? I can’t see myself as a stenographer, or a governess, or an office clerk, or as a companion

to an irritable old lady ! In fact, I can think of dozens of things not to be, but the point is, what is there left to choose ?”

“ Why don’t you act for the cinema ?” suggested Doris eagerly. “ It would be awful fun, and think how rich Mary Pickford is, or Charlie Chaplin ! Or you could be an artist’s model and pose for the nude. You’ve got lovely legs, and I’ve heard that managers give awfully good parts to girls with good legs.”

“ Oh, revue !” snorted Emma contemptuously. “ What could I do in revue ? ‘ Song and Dance ’ perhaps, if I were lucky enough to get off with the manager—all high kicks and low words ; I know the sort of thing ! Thank you, no ! I want to act—I want fame !”

She sprang off the bed and gazed at the flushed, bright-eyed reflection in the glass, then, between her teeth : “ And if I can only get out of this rut I swear I’ll get it too !”

A sound over by the door caused both girls to look round quickly. There, with a sardonic smile on his face, stood Nicholas Durville, his tall, sparse figure framed in the doorway.

“ Parvum parva decent,” he murmured to himself.

“ What does that mean, father ?” asked Emma

sharply, blushing to think that her ambitious longings should have been overheard.

“A word of wisdom from my most honoured of all old friends Horace,” replied her father airily. “Which being interpreted into the vulgar tongue means that the humbler the ambitions of the necessitous widowed daughter of a retired London surgeon, the better for her. Find a second husband, Emma, and leave fame alone !”

“Horace Who, father ?” asked Doris inquisitively, wondering who this officious old family friend could be.

But Nicholas Durville only laughed, and as he walked away down the passage towards his dressing-room, he called out :

“If Emma has finished her flow of rhetoric, I should suggest that you both dress for dinner, as it is getting late.”

CHAPTER III

ON the following morning Emma wrote a letter. It was a letter of some importance, seemingly, for she tore up several pieces of note-paper before she began, and her mother reprimanded her sharply for being so wasteful in war-time.

"But the war is over," observed Emma irritatingly.

"Peace hasn't been signed yet," retorted her mother, "and only this morning there was an article in the *Morning Post* urging us to be less extravagant with paper."

Emma put her fingers in her ears, and stared obstinately out of the window at the wet garden, with its sodden, bare flowerbeds, its dripping, naked trees, her pen stuck between her teeth like a pipe, humming loudly. As Doris said, Emma often behaved like a cheeky little street urchin, and the mood was on her now. Mrs. Durville closed her mouth with an angry snap and returned to her accounts.

Emma took the letter down to the village herself, glad of the chance to escape from her family. She told herself they had grown more difficult to live with during the short interval

she had been separated from them. The air was surprisingly soft and mild for November, and the gentle wind that stirred Emma's hair under her small black hat and played with the ends of her scarf reminded her of early spring. Her spirits rose rapidly. She took off her gloves, and rolling them up into a little ball, amused herself by tossing it up in the air and catching it again. She almost danced along the road, and when she came to the steep slope that led down to the village she looked furtively round, and seeing no one about, ran all the way down the hill and arrived at the post office breathless and dishevelled, with pink cheeks and dancing eyes. She pushed the important missive through the letter-box, and at the soft little thud it made on the bottom she laughed excitedly and blew a kiss after it. It was at this moment that Mrs. Whitely, the Vicar's wife, saw Emma from across the road at the greengrocer's, where she was choosing some brussels sprouts for the Vicar's lunch. Mrs. Whitely disliked Emma poignantly, but the relish with which she had digested the news of the latter's bereavement sprang less from her personal dislike to the girl than from an habitually morbid attitude of mind: the misfortunes of others exhilarated her. She hurried across the High Street with quick, eager little steps; she was moved

to something almost akin to affection by the Emma of her imagination—a pale, subdued Emma in adversity.

“Oh, my dear!” she began in low, intimate, sorrowful tones, arrested, however, by Emma’s cheerful—

“How are you, Mrs. Whitely?”

Unfortunately Emma had never looked so young or so gay. Mrs. Whitely could scarcely conceal her pained surprise and, above all, her bitter disappointment.

“I just walked away without another word,” she told the Vicar impressively at lunch. “Her unconcern was positively indecent. . . . I always said she was a vain, empty-headed, shallow-hearted minx, and this proves it! She can’t have cared a rap for her husband; I believe her cheeks were rouged this morning. She will be married again within six months, mark my words! Like so many of these war widows, she’ll get round some poor silly man, you see if she doesn’t. All men are fools. . . . I don’t see her wonderful charm!” she concluded bitterly.

The Reverend Ernest Whitely sighed rather wistfully over his boiled beef, because he did; Emma always laughed at his little jokes, and he found her good to look upon.

Emma did not receive any answer to her letter

for a week or so, during which time she was moody and irritable, and if she opened her mouth at all it was to utter some disagreeable truth about her family. When the longed-for letter arrived at last, however, the contents brought a smile of satisfaction to her lips. Her mood immediately changed; she became radiant, helpful and sweet-tempered to her mother, and very gay and amusing with her father and Doris. When Mr. Durville commented caustically upon her good spirits, she made an important announcement.

"I have got the prospects of a job, father! A secretaryship, very well paid!"

Nicholas Durville stared at her blankly.

"But you can't use a typewriter, you don't know shorthand, and you can't even spell," he objected, looking puzzled.

"Oh, but I am going up to London to-morrow to learn," cried Emma gaily. "Listen! Peggy Samson, who was at school with me, is going to learn too, at quite a cheap place, and she says I can share her rooms in Oakley Street, as her people want her to be chaperoned. Once I have learnt typing and shorthand, she says she knows of a splendid job for me."

"Where is this place where Peggy Samson is learning?" inquired her mother suspiciously.

"Oh—er—she hasn't let me know yet," replied

Emma vaguely. She fidgeted about impatiently until her father reluctantly gave his consent.

“You are old enough to make your own decisions, my dear, and so long as you don’t run into debt, and ask me to pay your creditors, you can’t come to much harm. But let me warn you, you won’t like a secretaryship, even if you are so fortunate as to obtain one; there are only two types of posts: in one you will be so hard worked that you will lose your looks, and in the other you will be continually asked down to Brighton for the week-end!”

Emma only laughed.

“Then it’s settled! I shall wire to Peggy to-morrow and tell her I’ll join her in London after Christmas.”

She kissed her father and mother good-night with unwonted affection, and ran upstairs two at a time; outside Doris’s bedroom she paused, then pushed open the door very softly.

“Are you asleep?” she whispered, and Doris sat up in bed rubbing her eyes.

“Oh, Doris, such fun, such fun!”

“What’s the matter, Emma? Why are you dancing about like a lunatic?”

Emma stopped her polka round the room and perched herself at the end of her sister’s bed.

"Can you keep a secret?" she asked her impressively.

"Yes! I swear it on the Bible!" answered Doris, with sleepy solemnity.

"Very well, then, listen! I—am—going—on—the—stage!"

Doris stared at her incredulously.

"You remember Peggy Samson, don't you? That girl in the lower fifth, very pretty and rather stupid—she had a craze for me my first term, and she used to do my maths for me, and I used to write all her French compositions. Well, I'm going to share her lodgings in Chelsea, and I shall go to the College of Histrionic Art with her, and from there I shall go on the stage!"

"Oh, Emma, what will the family say?"

Emma laughed.

"I've told them I'm going to learn typing and shorthand, and the poor dears are completely taken in! They think I'm going to get a clerical job—so nice and respectable! Aren't I clever?"

Doris gazed at her open-mouthed.

"Oh, Emma! What will they say when they see your photograph in the *Daily Mirror*, and find out that you're a famous actress? Oh, you will give us seats for your first night, won't you?"

"Oh, Doris!" cried Emma, suddenly sobered.
"But I may be a dreadful failure."

Doris shook her head vehemently.

"No, you won't," she said confidently. "You'll make people think you can act, even if you can't."

"I want to make people thrill and cry all for me!" sighed Emma. "I want to hear my voice echoing out into a huge London theatre, packed with people who count in the world! I know I've got the power to move them if only I get the chance."

"'To bed, to bed, said sleepy head,'" quoted a bright voice in the doorway, and Mrs. Dürville, who always spoke in verse if she could find lines suitable to the occasion, hustled Emma off to her own room, in such a good temper at the prospect of her imminent departure that she forbore to scold her for interrupting her sister's peaceful slumber.

CHAPTER IV

AFTER a quiet Christmas dutifully spent in the bosom of her family, Emma embarked upon her London career. She and Peggy Samson shared three dingy little rooms in Oakley Street, Chelsea, and every day they went by bus to the College of Histrionic Art, two gaunt, gloomy houses knocked into one, in Bloomsbury. The first few days were something of an ordeal even to Emma, with all her confidence and lack of self-consciousness; she found herself continually called upon to face a new teacher, and a class filled with a strange medley of types hitherto unknown to her; forced to stand up before their inquisitive eyes and recite. Gradually she lost the feeling of nervousness and became hardened to the experience; also, she grew to realize, and to be grateful for, her many natural advantages; her low-pitched, well-modulated voice, and her innate sense of dramatic values. She found much amusement in watching the pathetic efforts of some of her fellow-students, who could not even master the King's English. At the impatient command "Speak up! Speak up!" their voices would wax shrill and quavering; Emma did some excellent

imitations of them afterwards to Peggy. She was continually struck by the amazing lack of talent exhibited daily by these girls and men who were seriously adopting the stage as a profession, and she did not flatter herself unduly when she was singled out for the best parts in the various plays they acted. These afforded her amusement and scope for her superabundance of dramatic instinct; but the elocution class bored her to distraction. She hated making hideous and ludicrous sounds in a chorus of others, who excelled her in the art, but she realized the importance of knowing her job thoroughly, and she was consoled by picturing herself saying in future days of fame and renown: "I started from the bottom of the ladder, you know." And she could not help thinking how well it would sound! Privately, she was convinced that she was a born actress, and her devoted and admiring friend Peggy encouraged her in the belief.

"You are wonderful!" she would exclaim, when Emma made her criticize her home-work: speeches from Shakespeare, short monologues, and poems, which she used to recite in front of a glass. "You could do anything! You've got the loveliest voice I've ever heard and your figure is quite perfect! I heard Mr. Patterson—he's the one with the long, wavy hair, whom you said

had a squint—he told me he’s been out in the East, and he said you walked like one of the Eastern women who are accustomed to carry pitchers of water on their head; he says it gives them a beautiful carriage, like yours !”

Emma accepted this homage calmly, as her due, but it nevertheless softened her feelings towards Mr. Patterson.

“Perhaps the poor boy only squints in the distance,” she conceded generously.

The days were golden to Emma now; she had never enjoyed herself so much in her life. Her ambitious vanity fed on the admiration of her fellow-students, some of whom were jealous of her and said spiteful things behind her back, but most of whom surprised Emma by their generosity. Two or three girls conceived a violent *schwärmerei* for her, and, thin and shabbily dressed though they were, they spent money they could ill afford on pathetic little offerings of flowers and sweets, which they would bring to Emma with a humility that touched even while it sickened her.

“Nothing disgusts me except humility !” she exclaimed to Peggy one day. “I believe vice rather attracts me, sickness and poverty only depress me, but humble people make me sick !”

The men were all half in love with her, but were too shy of each other to make any advances, for

which Emma was devoutly thankful, since it was not in her nature to refuse friendship when it was offered her, and she classified the young men at the College as quite impossible. Her first friend was Ivy Deerham, daughter of the all-important Henry Deerham, the once famous actor whose judgment and experienced opinion were the only things that mattered at the College. Emma, seeing at a glance that the old man's daughter was his one weakness, set out deliberately to make a friend of Ivy. It was easily accomplished: Emma could be very entertaining when she chose, and Ivy soon thought her a genius and told her father so. He laughed indulgently at his darling's new fancy, but to please Ivy he gave Emma the part she had been longing for, and allowed her to play Lady Macbeth in some scenes from *Macbeth* which he produced at the end-of-term entertainment.

Emma simply revelled in the part, sweeping about in trailing, mediæval draperies, lingering on the wonderful cadences with her deep contralto voice. She made a very feminine, passionate, appealing Lady Macbeth; it is doubtful whether William Shakespeare would have been pleased with her interpretation of his creation, but it is certain that her audience were charmed.

“ ‘All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten

this little hand,'” she moaned, and her low voice was vibrant and moving.

One girl sobbed, and the sob was not lost upon the wailing, passionate creature wringing her hands upon the small stage, for only one half of Emma was on the stage; the other was in the audience, watching herself intently. Sir Hugo Sefton, the great Shakespearean actor and producer, recently knighted, was in front, and Emma could discern his restless, mobile, lined face, a powerful, arresting face, which stood out among all the others even in the dim light. He came to the performance yearly, to criticize, to pick up promising pupils, and mention their names to Deerham.

“I like that girl’s voice,” he said, leaning over and speaking into Henry Deerham’s ear. “She made a damned bad Lady Macbeth, but then, they always do! I will say this for her, she certainly got her effects! How long has she been here, Harry?”

The great man afterwards demanded to be introduced to Emma.

“You’ve only been here since January, I hear,” he said. “Well, you’ve still got a lot to learn, my dear!”

Emma smiled, and the actor noticed her even, white teeth.

“Oh, I know that,” she replied, fascinated by

the still beautiful Grecian profile which, up to a few years ago, was to be seen in every picture-postcard shop-window, and by the creased pouches under his eyes: they made him look so dissipated!

"If you make up your mind to work really hard, like a good little girl, you might do something later on," continued Sefton, smiling back at her. "You've got many natural advantages—a good voice, and you get your effects easily; but I'm afraid you'll get lazy, and then you'll never do any good!"

"Do you think I could ever do something really big?" asked Emma eagerly, with flushed cheeks and shining eyes.

The heavy, mediæval dress accentuated her youthfulness, and in her eagerness she laid her hand on his arm. The expression in Sefton's eyes changed; he took her hand in his and examined it, smilingly.

"It is a 'little hand,' isn't it?" he quoted caressingly, and Emma's fingers very softly returned his pressure. "Why, it's trembling!" he murmured. "Are you cold?"

Emma smiled into his eyes.

"No, only excited. This is a great moment in my life, you see," she answered bashfully, and she saw his eyes light up with gratified vanity.

Henry Deerham came up and tapped him on the shoulder, and the great man turned away.

"What did Sir Hugo say to you?" asked Ivy and Peggy eagerly a little later, when Emma was divesting herself of the dignified, queenly garments and removing the grease-paint from her face.

"Oh, he said I had a lot to learn." She slipped out of her robes, and stood before the glass, looking absurdly slim and youthful in nothing but a silk vest. Then she smiled reflectively. "He was very nice about it," she added, and Ivy and Peggy burst into a song of praise.

"You were marvellous!" cried Ivy.

"You were wonderful!" exclaimed Peggy.

"Mr. Patterson said you made him cry!"

"How disgusting!" observed Emma ungratefully. "It must be awfully awkward when he cries, because I don't suppose he knows which way the tears are going out of the eye that squints! I expect he splashed the people next to him."

They both laughed at her feeble joke, and then Ivy continued the song of praise.

"Sir Hugo looked most awfully impressed," she cried. "I heard him tell Dad he thought you had a beautiful voice."

A sense of despair, of impotence, broke over Emma. She waved her clenched fists in the air.

"That's no use to me, even if he did! He's

gone away, and he'll have forgotten my very existence by the time his car reaches his front door. Oh! if only I could have my chance I swear I'd make the most of it!"

During the next few days she was discontented and moody. Her first taste of success left no sweetness in her mouth. She was listless, irritable, restless, nothing seemed to amuse or interest her, and Peggy could not think what had come over her usually entertaining companion. Deeply grateful herself for the smallest crumbs of the good things of life, she utterly failed to understand Emma's attitude; she could not realize that Emma, so greedy for all, would naturally despise a little. "L'appétit vient en mangeant," and it was a question of all or nothing with Emma now. Never had any young woman been so ravenous for publicity, for renown.

Vaguely disturbed by Emma's bitter mood, Peggy ventured timidly to remonstrate, but was instantly snubbed for her pains, and although she loved Emma very loyally, she actually heaved a sigh of relief when the latter joined her family down at Crowbridge for Easter.

CHAPTER V

EMMA returned to the College after the Easter vacation in a mood of impatience. She was already tired of it. In her mind she likened the College to a stagnant pond wherein she had sunk all her talent and her power to charm, and, after the little splash they had made going in, she could see the water growing smooth and calm again, and the dank, green weeds closing in over the surface of the pool. As she looked at the girl who had won the scholarship, the prize pupil, a pale, anæmic, earnest, down-at-heel young woman, with her hair knotted untidily and unbecomingly on the top of her head, she gnashed her teeth. Her diction might be wonderful, her delivery technically perfect, but Emma was convinced that the wan, feeble personality would never hold an audience; the girl was entirely lacking in charm. Emma, in her mood of rebellion, would have entirely revolutionized the whole College. It seemed to her that it was run on the wrong system. Charm, personality, emotionalism, these qualities did not count here. Emma's spirit was in revolt. At first, true, she had appeared to count; she had created a stir

with her glowing vitality; but now she was being sucked under, swamped by the old College traditions, the old-fashioned reverence for technicality. A terrible, maddening sensation of suffocation swept over her: it seemed to her that she was buried alive, that she was destined to live her life in a subterranean passage between an out-of-the-way sleepy little village in Devonshire and this silent, musty grave in Bloomsbury. She felt, in her supreme conceit, that if she could but thrust her head above the heavy soil which covered her the world would surely notice and acclaim her.

These thoughts crowded through her head as, on the morning after her return, she sat in the elocution class, her under-lip protruding sulkily, her eyes half-closed with boredom.

A strange voice caused her to look up quickly, almost startled, not so much because the voice was unfamiliar, but because it struck a new note, somehow, within the dingy College walls. An imperious, self-important drawl, seeming to proclaim in every inflection that it had never asked for anything in vain; that there was nothing in life left to demand; whilst those other common, plaintive voices, echoing through the gaunt building, were so full of humble wants and simple desires, for ever to be left unsatisfied.

Emma, glancing quickly across the room, saw a beautiful profile; eager, parted lips slightly petulant; a slender, drooping figure, dressed in the brightest scarlet; thin white hands clasping bony knees, the short skirt shooting upwards, revealing long, slim legs in expensive silk stockings. A very lovely face, it was not its beauty that arrested Emma's gaze, but an air of familiarity.

"I know I've seen that girl before, somewhere," she kept saying to herself, racking her brains to find out where.

All of a sudden it came to her. Of course—the *Pratler*! Almost every week there was a photograph of her in that paper, on the golf links, on the tennis courts; bathing, dancing, posing in tableaux vivants at charity matinees; looking as beautiful as an angel in a nurse's uniform during the War, and since the Armistice in a ball-dress—"The Honourable Angela Lumley, one of next season's debutantes."

The advent of the society beauty marked a new epoch in Emma's career: it signified so much to her. Angela Lumley! To Emma she was the gateway to a world into which she, peeping wistfully through the bars, had long sought admission—a world to which she felt she had a just claim—a world which she intended to conquer before she was done with it.

In spite of all her social training and her complete lack of anything approaching shyness or self-consciousness, Angela Lumley felt a little lost in this strange, unfriendly *milieu*. There was no one to talk to; she was stared at by cold, hostile, inquisitive eyes. Whereas Emma had appealed to the students, fascinated and amused them, and had succeeded in bridging the gulf that lay between herself and them, all the instincts of the class to which they belonged revolted against Angela Lumley. Dimly, subconsciously, they had known that Emma was struggling, fighting for something, and they respected her for it; but this beautiful, weirdly dressed, self-satisfied new-comer—one had only to look at her to realize that there was nothing she was fighting for, no odds against her—she was remote from everything in their own lives, and they fiercely resented her presence. Only partly aware of this and yet feeling out of place here, Angela looked round, instinctively seeking the adulation and approval that greeted her every action in her own world, and came upon Emma, whose glowing, vivid personality shone all the brighter in the drab environment, whose quick brain, amusing comments, and abundant vitality placed her on a pedestal beside those dead, lifeless others.

Angela proved to be very approachable.

"I've been dying to come for ages," she told Emma, "but Daddy and Mummy were so tiresome! They are rather stuffy old darlings, you know! But at last I persuaded them to let me come here. I am simply mad to go on the stage, you know, and we're frightfully hard up since the War, so I told them not to be such damn fools, and the darlings let me come at last."

Emma worked hard to please her. She mimicked all the others to Angela in private, and was particularly good at taking off poor Patterson, squinting over Mark Antony's speech: "Friends, bear with me, my heart is in the coffin there with Cæsar."

Angela was simply delighted with her; Emma became her new toy.

"She's got marvellous charm, darling," she told her mother, and Lady Lumley, always anxious to see Angela's latest plaything, invited Emma to dinner.

Emma, one of Nature's brilliant opportunists, kept her head over this great event, without in the least underrating its importance in her life, however. She was cool and calculating, and the new frock which she bought for the occasion and the one-and-sixpenny taxi which took her to the Lumleys' house in Eaton Square she regarded in the nature of an investment, knowing

how bad a beginning it would be to arrive looking hot and dishevelled after a journey by bus. The reflection she saw in the mirror outside the drawing-room door told her she had done wisely. As the butler announced her she drew a deep breath. To her it seemed that he was announcing her to all London—to Society—to those people whose comings and goings, whose health and family concerns, were all chronicled under “Court News” in *The Times*—to the People Who Mattered—in fact, it was the biggest moment of her life. For one second she hung back, almost overwhelmed; then, never more tremendously Emma, her head set level, her shoulders square and perfectly still, as if she were balancing a pitcher of water on her head, moving easily and gracefully from the hips in her own becoming way, she walked into the room with the light of conquest gleaming in her eyes.

Angela made a dart at her.

“Come and be introduced, darling! Mummy . . . Daddy . . . everybody! This is Mrs Smith, who is absolutely and entirely unlike her terrible name. She is full of charm, and is going on the stage, and she’ll soon be the rage of London!”

Angela stood in the middle of the room, one arm linked in Emma’s, and the other flung wide

in a beautiful, careless gesture which she had been told was becoming to her. She was dressed in a black-sequined frock, which was years too old for her; her hair was dragged back off her forehead, and her lips rouged. Emma instantly wished she had put some lip-salve on her own, but she had not dared. Lady Lumley was a thin, faded edition of Angela; Emma thought her pearls were wasted on her bony, ribbed bosom. Lord Lumley was a big, striking-looking man, with a long upper lip and an eye-glass. Angela's sister, Lady Greyson, was like a Nevinson picture, red-haired, green-eyed, very tall and thin; she stared languidly at Emma without moving from the sofa, where she was curled up against scarlet cushions that matched her lips. Emma was introduced to three other girls, all thin and flat-chested, with a slouching walk and round shoulders; they, too, stared at her—without hostility—impersonally and inquisitively, as if she were a new music-hall turn. From them she turned instinctively towards the men. There was a tall emaciated-looking youth with sad green eyes whom Angela called "Hughie darling." Tony Greyson, Angela's brother-in-law, was broad-shouldered, with a nice red face and kind eyes; he reminded Emma of a cocker spaniel. There was a vacant-looking, sandy-haired youth, called Tim Nestor,

and two very young, fair men in the Guards, who talked alike, walked alike, laughed alike, and looked alike, so that Emma never discovered which was which throughout the evening, but as she afterwards discovered they were twins, it did not much matter. Lastly she bowed to a pale, grave face, apart from the others, and so unlike them that Emma stared at it in wonder. Dark and quite young, of medium height and of square build, Emma thought him rather like Napoleon; then she caught his name, and his identity flashed upon her. He was Gordon Hereford, the author and dramatist.

She was grateful to Angela, who had arranged that he should take Emma in to dinner; she had heard people say he was difficult to talk to, silent, reserved, taciturn, but Emma found him quite the reverse. It so happened that she was the type of womanhood that appealed to him most; he admired her heavy-lidded blue eyes, her tender creamy throat, the soft curves and lissom grace of her beautiful body. She succeeded in making him talk, and all the time she was watching his pale, grave, clever profile, with its cruel under-lip, almost Oriental in its sensuality; and his sensitive, nervous, gesticulating hands. His cynical wit delighted Emma; his cold, cruel, sneering attitude towards life neither surprised nor shocked her;

indeed, accustomed as she was to hearing her father discussing human nature, it never occurred to her that a man of brains and individuality could possibly look upon the world from any other point of view.

After dinner, when the women went upstairs, Emma found herself on the sofa with Priscilla Greyson, whose conversation proved at once entertaining and enlightening.

"You know Cynthia Lovitt, of course? Oh, don't you? I thought everyone knew Cynthia by name, anyway. Well, she's dyed her hair! Isn't it splendid of her? That's what I call moral courage! A marvellous shade! The colour of autumn leaves. It used to be mouse-coloured, you know, and was going grey. So wise of her, don't you think so? I suppose you've heard that Lord Penguin is living with Myrtle Durcarne, the famous 'cellist? Oh, yes! And poor Lady Penguin has refused to divorce him; she's perfectly miserable and has taken to drugs; poor Celia—too sad!—she's a morphia maniac now, and they say she's just fallen madly in love with the nigger who plays the drum in Ciro's band!"

Half the names were strange to Emma; she did not give herself away, however, but stored up the information in her mind, for future use. She

sat quietly drinking it all in, her heavy lids drooping over half-closed eyes, and her under-lip thrust slightly forward, as it often was, in repose. It was thus that Gordon Hereford found her when he came upstairs. She reminded him of an old oil painting of the Virgin Mary, and he thought how beautiful she would look with a child in her arms; the deep, brooding tenderness that clung about her afforded him a strange sense of repose.

Angela sprang to her feet, restless and eager.

"Now, then, everybody must do their stunts!" she exclaimed, running across the room to the tall, thin young man with the reproachful green eyes. "Come on, Hughie, your new song, please!"

She dragged him to the piano and thrust him down on the music stool. Thus bullied into it, poor Hughie started to sing in a plaintive, whiny voice that was rather attractive, and Angela informed everyone that the catchy tunes and amusing words were his own composition. When he had finished Angela and her sister sang a rag-time duet together. Lady Lumley liked this part of the entertainment best of all, and gazed adoringly at them, beating time on the arm of her chair with her small withered hand sparkling with rings. Tony Greyson was then prevailed upon to give a demonstration of his one and only accomplishment—a truly lifelike imitation of

a bath running away, with no other assistance than a tumbler of water. Emma laughed at this performance until the tears trickled down her cheeks—it was so utterly ridiculous and so like what it was intended to be—and Gordon Hereford mentally registered the fact that it did not become her to laugh, but when she looked up at him a moment later, he changed his mind and decided that it made her look more feminine and passionate to have slightly swollen lids.

After this Angela and the sandy-haired youth gave an exhibition of modern dancing, but Angela soon tired of it and suggested that she, her partner, Hughie and Priscilla would act a charade.

“While we’re dressing up Babs will play you her ‘piece.’ I don’t expect any of you care for classical music, but we shan’t be long, so you must grin and bear it!”

Babs Freeman, Angela’s cousin, to whom Emma had taken a vague dislike on account of her air of cool superiority to everybody present, slouched indifferently to the piano and played Debussy’s “Après-midi d’un faune” with brilliant technique and singularly little feeling.

Tony Greyson yawned and fidgeted without ceasing beside Emma, on the sofa.

“I don’t care for this flatulent music!” he whispered huskily in her ear. “Do you?”

He was like a great child that must be amused all the time and Emma was relieved when the charades started. The charade itself bored Emma, who had all the professional's contempt for the work of the amateur; also she was piqued that Angela had not asked her to take part in it, because she thought she might have made an impression on Gordon Hereford. At the end of the charade, however, Angela darted forward and caught her by the hand.

"Now, Emma darling—I must call you Emma 'cos your other name is so ugly—you are going to do your cockney monologue, the one you did yesterday at the College!"

"No, no," cried Emma, blushing vividly. "Nobody would care for it. It isn't suitable!"

"Yes, yes, you must. I've kept your stunt to the last on purpose because it's the best. You must!"

Angela was almost weeping with disappointment and Emma hesitated.

"Please!"

This was spoken in Gordon Hereford's slow, hesitating voice, and to Emma it seemed a command. Something within her was urging her to obey and a voice seemed to say:

"If you fail now, you fail for ever. If you succeed now, you will have succeeded for always."

She stood up in the centre of the room and faced her critical, unsympathetic audience.

"How shall I ever make these cheerful, well-fed, self-conscious, unimaginative people feel?" she cried to herself. But she dismissed her fears resolutely. "I can, and I will!"

It was a simple cockney monologue of a woman who has bidden farewell to her soldier husband, on his way back to the trenches. She made the story seem very real, very vivid. Tears stole down her cheeks and her deep voice vibrated on the hearts of her audience. When she had finished there was a breathless silence, and Emma knew she had succeeded. Tony Greyson blew his nose violently as Emma sank down beside him.

"Let's have a brighter piece now," he suggested, clearing his throat noisily. "That one was so mournful."

"There now! Didn't I tell you she was wonderful?" exclaimed Angela triumphantly. "You're all crying, although you're pretending you're not! Isn't she a marvel?"

There was a faint murmur of acquiescence, but Angela felt that with the exception of Gordon Hereford they were all rather shy and embarrassed, and glad it was over. In that set one recited either something funny or else something feebly sentimental: one didn't cry and make

others cry in a drawing-room. It simply wasn't done.

Emma felt a little crestfallen and was relieved when the butler announced that Lady Greyson's car was at the door, and the party broke up. As she advanced to say good-night to her hostess, Gordon Hereford glided up behind her.

"Can I give you a lift?" he asked in a low, imperative voice. "My car is outside."

"Oh, thank you," Emma answered carelessly, hoping he wouldn't notice that she was blushing with gratification; "it's very kind of you."

As she stepped into his smart coupé her heart beat fast with pleasure, and she looked forward to a tête-à-tête with the well-known dramatist. They glided noiselessly through the lighted streets and for some few minutes she and her companion sat mute and motionless, until she began to fear that the drive home was going to be a dull and uneventful end to a wonderful evening.

Then, at last, Gordon Hereford cleared his throat nervously and broke the silence.

"I have a proposal to make to you," he said suddenly.

Emma's heart leapt within her.

"What can he be going to say?" she asked herself wonderingly. "Can he be going to ask me to marry him?"

She sat quite still with her hands folded in her lap, although her heart was beating tumultuously. Gordon Hereford noted the fact, and approved: he thought women should always be reposeful.

"How long have you been at the College of Histrionic Art?" he asked her abruptly.

"Three months," answered Emma a little breathlessly, infected by his nervousness. "Why do you ask?"

"You've no experience?"

"No. None," she replied sadly.

"Do you think you'd be capable of playing a pretty big part with the little tuition you've had?"

Emma drew a deep breath.

"Yes, I think so," she answered quietly, digging her nails into the palms of her hands in her excitement.

He turned and stared at her in the half-darkness of the car.

"I believe you could do it," he said slowly, as if he were speaking to himself. "You've got the right voice and the right face, and you've only got to be what you were to-night in your cockney monologue, and you'll be exactly what I want."

"Oh, please go on—please explain!"

"Martin Lawrence is producing a new play of mine at the Siddons in a few weeks' time—Estelle Arthur and Martin Lawrence are playing

the leading parts and Hetty Bell is the old aunt, but Lawrence is tearing his hair because the girl who was to have played the part of 'Lizzie,' a cockney flower-girl, has suddenly been operated on for appendicitis. We're all at sixes and sevens." He paused, dramatically.

"Yes?" whispered Emma, almost inaudibly.

"Do you think you would be capable of doing it?" he asked her gently.

Emma felt she was suffocating with excitement, and the lights along the King's Road were dancing before her eyes.

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" she exclaimed in her vibrating contralto. "I feel I must be dreaming, but even if I wake up in a few minutes, let me thank you quickly while this beautiful dream goes on!"

Her ingenuous enthusiasm pleased him.

"I shall have to consult Martin Lawrence first, of course. As he will have to act with you, he will doubtless consider himself before me," said Gordon Hereford, smiling, "but I know he has no one else in sight at present. Only yesterday he was deploring the dearth of *ingénues* on the English stage. He'll want to see you, of course, and find out for himself what you can do. Can you by any chance lunch with me to-morrow? I'll get hold of Lawrence, and I'll ask Angela to make

a fourth—she will enjoy it, she likes to be ‘in’ everything. Will that suit you?”

“Oh, thank you,” breathed Emma rapturously.

“Very well, then. The Berkeley to-morrow at one-thirty, and we’ll go back to my house afterwards, and then you can show Lawrence what you can do.”

They pulled up outside Emma’s rooms in Oakley Street.

“Good-night, and thank you! Has any girl ever had such luck as I’ve had to-night, I wonder? Oh, how good of you to give me such a chance! I shall never forget it, never! Good-night.”

He took her outstretched hand, smiling at her excitement.

“You may be sure that if you prove no good at rehearsals, Lawrence will politely acquaint you with the fact. But I have a feeling that you are the person I have been looking for—I trust my instincts, and I believe it’s been a lucky evening for me as well as for you.”

Emma waved and ran up the steps, then she came running down again.

“Mr. Hereford—one moment, please——”

“Yes?”

“If Martin Lawrence makes difficulties, would anything Sir Hugo Sefton said about me influence him in any way?”

"Certainly it would. Why? Do you know Sefton?"

"He came to the College the other day, and I think he would speak well of me. Tell him I was Lady Macbeth, will you? because he won't know my name."

She ran up the steps again, fumbling for her latch-key, and Gordon Hereford thrust his head out of the car:

"One minute. How old are you?" he called out abruptly.

Emma walked slowly down the steps.

"Twenty-three. Oh, is that too old?"

"No, not so old as all that," he answered, smiling into her anxious, upturned face lit up by the rays of the adjacent lamp post.

Then he drove away; and Emma tiptoed softly upstairs to bed.

CHAPTER VI

MARTIN LAWRENCE, reputed to be the most beautiful young man in London, was sitting over a cocktail in the lounge of the Berkeley, listening to Gordon Hereford and Hugo Sefton discussing a young woman whom he had never set eyes on, and whose name was as unfamiliar as her face.

"I met her last night at the Lumleys' for the first time," said Gordon Hereford, in his slow, half-hesitating way. "But she is the girl I have been hunting for to do 'Lizzie.' She has got the most marvellous, warm, passionate voice and, curiously enough, she has exactly the personality I was thinking of when I was working on 'Lizzie'—emotional, vivid, and entirely free from modern mannerisms and affectations; there is something almost primitive about her."

Martin Lawrence glanced at him curiously. He knew Gordon Hereford well enough to be not a little surprised; it was entirely unlike him to meet a girl at a dinner party and before the evening was out suggest that she should act in his new play. It seemed to Martin Lawrence the act of a madman, and Gordon Hereford was by nature deliberate, far-sighted, well-balanced, and all his

actions were the result of long thought and carefully-prepared plans. That he should act in such a reckless fashion seemed to Lawrence a problem that could only be solved in one way—the dramatist must obviously have fallen in love with the girl. It really was most unfortunate. To fall out with Gordon Hereford at this stage of the proceedings was the last thing he desired, and yet, if the girl should prove to be a dud, he swore to himself that she should not be permitted to ruin the whole play. Here Hugo Sefton's well-trained voice interrupted his uneasy reflections.

“I was greatly struck with her myself,” he was saying. “Of course the girl has a lot to learn. She is only a beginner, and I saw her do Lady Macbeth, a part that requires years of experience, and really hard work, you know, Mr. Hereford.” He looked reflectively at his second Martini as though he could not quite understand what he was to do with it. “She has a wonderful, an unusually beautiful voice, and a most magnetic personality.”

Lawrence remained sceptical at heart, for when a woman was attractive Hugo Sefton was inclined to overlook her other deficiencies. His middle-aged but too susceptible heart interfered sadly with his managerial judgment.

Now they were joined by Angela Lumley, clamorously delighted to be seen lunching with three celebrities. The party attracted a good deal of attention, because Angela always made herself conspicuous and was almost as well known as the three men. She sat in the centre of the group, drinking a cocktail, talking and gesticulating, with a long tortoiseshell cigarette holder between her teeth, a slender, slouching, picturesque figure, her head turbaned in scarlet and gold.

Gordon Hereford was not listening to Angela's animated conversation. He kept his eye fixed on the door, and each time it swung back he half rose from his seat, then sank back again disappointedly. At last he sprang to his feet with a welcoming smile, and Martin Lawrence looked up sharply.

Emma was fully ten minutes late, but she was calm and serene, and moved towards them with leisurely grace. Martin Lawrence was struck by her carriage, upright and supple, moving from the waist, without jerking her head and shoulders; it struck him that her walk was *démodé* in contrast to the fashionable slouch. She was dressed in black, with a large shady hat; her face was pale and her eyes looked very big and deeply blue.

She refused a cocktail and they trooped into the restaurant.

"I look rather different from when I last saw

you, don't I?" said Emma demurely to Hugo Sefton, across the table, and Martin Lawrence admitted to himself that her voice surpassed his expectations.

He addressed a remark to her, and she answered him with a husky laugh and a smiling glance out of the drooping corners of her eyes.

Angela laid her hand on his arm.

"Martin, what do you think of Emma? Isn't her voice too divine? You must arrange to make her the heroine of your next play! I'm sure you'd adore making love to her on the stage, wouldn't you?" She turned abruptly to Emma. "Doesn't he make a marvellous lover?"

Emma blushed.

"I'm ashamed to confess it, but do you know I have never seen Mr. Lawrence act!"

Angela had again turned to Lawrence.

"Martin, you haven't said yet what you think of Emma."

He looked across at Emma, and as their eyes met she smiled at him confidently.

"Well, Angela, you must give me time," he said, laughing. "You do rush things, you know."

"It's my creed," retorted Angela. "I always make a point of telling people exactly what I think of them, and calling those I like by their Christian names directly I meet them! I shall

never forget your face when I called you 'Martin' the first time I met you. You did look so silly!"

"I confess I was rather taken aback," he answered, smiling across the table at Emma. "Wouldn't you have been, Mrs. Smith?"

"*Mrs. Smith*," mimicked Angela. "Don't be such a prig, Martin. Call her Emma immediately! 'Mrs. Smith' is a name that would damn any woman, even were she as lovely as the dawn. Fancy if the Venus de Milo were called Mrs. Smith, how differently we should all feel about her!"

"'A rose . . .'" began Martin Lawrence tritely, but he was interrupted by a shrill scream from Angela.

"For God's sake, my poor Martin, spare us! You may be an Adonis to look at, but even so it's difficult to forgive your really lamentable habit of always saying the obvious!"

Emma diplomatically gave her attention to Gordon Hereford and Hugo Sefton, who were criticizing a new play, but all through lunch she was conscious of Martin Lawrence opposite, his eyes resting on her all the time, and her heart beat a measure of triumph, for she knew that she had already won, and that the game lay in her hands.

After lunch they went to Gordon Hereford's

house in York Terrace, Regent's Park, and there, in his gold-curtained, sombre drawing-room, filled with lacquer and Chinese porcelain, and low divans covered with dull gold cushions, Emma recited her cockney monologue. The soft, subdued colouring of the drawing-room was becoming to her and she found the atmosphere sympathetic. She acted better than on the previous night, and she sobbed so bitterly that she found it difficult to control herself; a sudden terror assailed her that she was making a fool of herself, but she was slightly comforted by the knowledge that it was not unbecoming to her to weep. Her auditors were very enthusiastic. Hugo Sefton was manifestly surprised and favourably impressed; Martin Lawrence said very little, but it was evident to Emma that she need entertain no further fears on his account; Gordon Hereford was mutely exultant over his discovery; and Angela beamed with importance and delight at the success of her new toy.

Emma went home on the top of a bus, intoxicated with excitement and triumph. The London season had just begun; Hyde Park was crowded with cars and carriages; as the bus rumbled down Park Lane Emma felt that she wanted to sing at the top of her voice. A soft breeze fanned her flushed face and cooled her

swollen eyes, still smarting from the tears she had shed over the monologue. The smell of the hot London pavements and the tarry roads; the stench of petrol; the faint scent of the dusty trees in the Park and the trampled grass, yellow under the hot sun, rose to her nostrils, as she breathed in the smell of a London summer, unlike any other smell in the world. A sense of the vastness of it all swept over her, but did not lessen her feeling of self-importance: the hour was Emma's, and this gay, heartless, rumbling, brightly-coloured, beautiful London was hers also.

When she reached Oakley Street she sat down and scribbled off an incoherent letter to her family, telling them of her wonderful piece of good fortune; and then, worn out by the excitement of the day, exhausted by the loss of all the will-power which she had expended to gain what she wanted, she curled herself up on the dingy, uncomfortable lodging-house sofa, and was soon sleeping like a child.

CHAPTER VII

It was the first night of the *Knight in the Gallery*, by Gordon Hereford, and the Siddons theatre was packed. The first-nighters rustled in one by one. The pit and the gallery were clapping each celebrity in turn, as they came into the stalls, and the critics had settled themselves down, with their habitual air of polite boredom. All through the house there was the usual atmosphere of suppressed excitement, but to-night, somehow, it seemed intensified.

The Lumleys were in a box, Angela dressed all in white, with a crown of golden leaves on her head; the Greysons were in the stalls; Priscilla was creating a sensation, swathed in a crimson shawl, and the women reporters were busy taking notes of her dress for the fashion-papers.

The Benjamins were in the front row of the stalls—regular first-nighters, both of them—Sadie Benjamin, a creamy-coloured brunette, half American, half Spanish, so beautiful that she was able to wear all the Benjamin diamonds and still look lovely; old “Benjy,” as they called him, squatting, toad-like, at her side, all nose and paunch, like a caricature by Bateman. Sitting

beside them was Lady Lovitt, very well known in the social world, whose particular claim to fame was that she happened to be the most successful collector of Lions in London. She speculated in celebrities, and would generously befriend obscure artists and necessitous poets, reaping her reward in later days, when they had become famous, by hearing people say: "Oh yes, the first time I met him was at one of Cynthia Lovitt's parties." But her intrinsic art lay in her knowledge of Natural History; having fed the Lion when he was hungry, she had the good sense not to expect anything in return; but the louder his roar, so to speak, the more enticing became her menu, and the more *recherché* the guests that she assembled to watch him eat. She was reputed to give first-class, second-class, and third-class parties. Sadie Benjamin had been asked to them all in turn, but since Benjy had received his Knighthood and come to the fore in political circles, her position now assured her of a standing invitation to the former.

Everyone was studying his programme with interest. Martin Lawrence and Estelle Arthur were universal favourites—it would have been impossible to find a better-looking couple throughout the world—and Hetty Bell had made the public laugh for years, generally in funny mother-

in-law parts. In fact, with one exception, it was an all-star cast, and the audience settled themselves down with a sigh of satisfaction to an evening of pure enjoyment. They knew they were going to get their money's worth.

The orchestra struck up and played a boisterous military march with more vigour than taste, then the lights flickered out one by one, the curtain went up, and the next moment the house sat hushed and breathless, lost in concentrated interest in the play.

Gordon Hereford always managed to hold them; he played with them as if they were children, tossing them from one emotion to another. He said clever, mordant things—the things which every man had sometimes thought of saying himself to his wife at breakfast, only somehow had never been able to put into words. And now the great audience, hearing them expressed on the stage trenchantly and epigrammatically, chuckled with delight. As the evening wore on, it dawned on them that *The Knight in the Gallery* was, without a doubt, the best thing that Hereford had done yet. In Emma's small part, as "Lizzie," the cockney flower-girl, he rose to the full height of his genius, and it must be said that Emma gave it its full value, and made the most of every moment of it. Not a shade, not an in-

flexion, was lost in her interpretation of the character. She kept her audience hovering between laughter and tears, and after her love-scene with Martin Lawrence at the end of the last act, they called her back again and again.

"I never heard of Emma Durville before!" exclaimed Cynthia Lovitt to Sadie Benjamin, under cover of the loud applause. Her voice sounded regretful and her eyes were sparkling with the greed of the collector. "Has anyone?"

"Yes—Angela was raving about her the other day," replied Sadie triumphantly, looking up at the Lumleys' box. "I forget the story now, but I think Angela told me Gordon Hereford had found her in the street, turning a barrel-organ! Isn't she wonderful?"

"Marvellous," acquiesced Cynthia Lovitt, clapping loudly and wondering at the same time if she could possibly ask Miss Durville to dinner on Friday night, to meet a penurious Belgian actor, a Polish musician and a Russian princess who was dining out all round London on the story of her thrilling escape from Bolshevich Russia.

To Emma, standing on the stage, gazing at the sea of upturned faces, and hearing the applause wax louder and louder, and the shouting of her name, it was a thrilling, a wonderful moment. Happy tears rolled down her cheeks, and she had

to clench her fists and dig her nails into the palms of her hands to prevent herself from breaking down altogether. She had so often visualized the scene as a child lying in bed, watching the flickering shadows on the nursery ceiling, that now, when those thoughts had at last materialized, she could hardly believe that she was awake. It was like a beautiful dream.

Gordon Hereford refused to take his call, but when the curtain fell for the last time he hurried round to the stage and congratulated Emma with a kiss. Emma had never kissed so many people in one evening as she did at the supper-party which followed the performance. Champagne flowed freely, and everybody was in the best of spirits. Martin Lawrence, Estelle Arthur—rather piqued by Emma's success which had temporarily eclipsed her own, but admirably disguising the fact beneath a fair, smiling exterior—Henry Deerham, Hugo Sefton, patting and pawing her, stroking her cheek when he thought no one was looking; Gordon Hereford, smiling and urbane, and yet, somehow, curiously aloof from the boisterous company; dear, good-natured Hetty Bell; and Peggy, so unselfishly delighted at Emma's success—she kissed them all in turn over and over again. She took no champagne for she disliked the taste of it, but she was intoxi-

cated with excitement. Her eyes were blazing, her speech stammering and incoherent—she was so happy—so happy—she loved everyone in the world—nobody repelled or disgusted her to-night—she adored Life.

Gordon Hereford gave her and Peggy a lift home in his car, and when she bade him good-night he kissed her again, in a fatherly manner, on her cheek.

“You were splendid, my dear,” he said, and Emma seized his hand and held it impulsively to her heaving bosom.

“It was all you,” she cried. “It’s a wonderful part—any fool could do it—and you’re a genius.”

Peggy looked on at the pair of them wistfully, but quite ungrudgingly, for she thought Emma was a genius, too.

CHAPTER VIII

EMMA had successfully embarked upon her career.

There was no doubt that the hit she had made as "Lizzie" had largely contributed to the success of *The Knight in the Gallery*. People told one another that it was really refreshing in these days of anæmic, neurotic and abnormal women to see anything as young, as real, and as unaffected as "Lizzie" the cockney flower-girl in Gordon Hereford's new play, and the suburbs flocked in their masses to the Siddons theatre, that they, too, might expatiate on the superlative charms of Emma Durville, a new discovery.

Cynthia Lovitt gave a party for her a week after the first night, and Emma shortly afterwards became the rage of London. There were "Lizzie" hats, and "Lizzie" dolls, and a popular Ragtime composer wrote a "Lizzie" one-step. Emma was asked everywhere, out to lunch, tea, dinner, and supper. The number of her free meals never ceased to delight her economical mind. She and Peggy left their gloomy lodgings in Oakley Street and moved into a tiny flat in King's Road. The timely demise of Aunt Emma, who left her undeserving god-daughter a small legacy, enabled Emma to furnish it modestly, but in accordance

with her innate sense of beauty. She was a little worried at first, because it was not a smart address, but the joy of having a home of her own soon reconciled her to the boisterous vulgarity of King's Road.

Her family had been prevented from attending the first night by Nicholas Durville, who said it was impossible to judge a play by its first performance; but they came up to London for a night, later on, and Emma gave them a box for *The Knight in the Gallery*. Nicholas Durville was deeply impressed by the ability of its author, but not so enthusiastic over the leading lady. He smiled scornfully at the burst of applause for Emma which filled the theatre at the end of the performance.

"Our little Emma is very clever," he observed dryly.

"She does act well, doesn't she?" replied Mrs. Durville, half-proudly, half-ashamedly, surprised at her husband's unwonted enthusiasm.

"No," he retorted calmly, "there's no need for acting. That girl Lizzie is a true portrait of Emma herself."

"That common, vulgar, primitive little cockney like Emma!" exclaimed Mrs. Durville indignantly. "You must be mad!"

Nicholas Durville made no reply. He went round to Emma's dressing-room, accompanied

by Doris, trembling with excitement, and his wife, tight-lipped and disapproving. Martin Lawrence was talking to Emma as they came in, and her mother warned Emma afterwards, in private, against good-looking young actors, and told her she could not be too careful of her reputation now that she was on the stage, and that she considered it was indiscreet of her to permit him to come into her dressing-room while she was in her peignoir.

"My dear mother!" laughed Emma good-naturedly. "But he's married."

Mrs. Durville shook her head.

"That makes it all the worse. He is very handsome," she said gloomily, as if she were predicting Emma's downfall.

"Oh, yes, he is easily the handsomest man in London," said Emma, laughing softly to herself.

Her mother shrugged her shoulders, and went back to Crowbridge the next day fully convinced that Emma was on the downward path. Had she but known, she could have set her mind at rest, for Emma was scrupulously careful and discreet, never going anywhere unless chaperoned by Peggy, very fastidious about her acquaintances, and no breath of scandal had ever reached her name.

She had reason to remember her mother's warning, however, a few weeks later, when Martin Lawrence disconcerted her by making ardent love

to her in a punt, one afternoon, during a picnic party at Pangbourne. They had escaped from the others and were floating peacefully down a backwater, when he took Emma by surprise by seizing her in his arms and kissing her passionately on the mouth. He looked very beautiful in white flannels, so earnest and so pleading; but Emma's reputation was dearer to her than Martin Lawrence, and she remained obdurate. At a loss for words, she conveniently burst into tears.

"How can you, how can you?" she sobbed, lifting her innocent blue eyes, drenched with tears, to his. "I always thought you were my friend!"

Martin, seized with compunction, took her hands in his and apologized. He declared she was an angel, and cursed himself for being such a clumsy brute. He swore he would never worry her again and humbly implored her not to let his avowal of love interfere with their friendship. Since then her relations with him had continued to be slightly dramatic; on the stage he was very passionate in his love scenes, and off he was wistful and unsuccessfully brotherly. It is doubtful which of them enjoyed the situation most, Emma or he—it was a wonderful opportunity for their dramatic instinct and they allowed it full play.

The Knight in the Gallery ran very successfully all through the season and promised to continue

right into the autumn. In August Emma was given one week's holiday, which she spent with the Greysons at their place in Gloucestershire about nine miles from Bath.

Angela was staying down there, also Tim Nestor, Babs Freeman, and Tony Greyson's best friend, Dick Cranford. The latter was older than Tony Greyson; Emma judged him to be about forty-five; tall and well-made, with keen blue eyes that wrinkled up when he smiled, and auburn hair, untouched with grey, that curled crisply round the temples. He was the first man of that age who had ever attracted Emma. Somehow, from the first moment they met she felt she had known him all her life. It was absurd, but the reason she first took to him was because he owned a chow, who accompanied him everywhere, a beautiful red chow, with a soft ruff standing out all round his head, and tawny-coloured, lion-like eyes.

He was lying on the polished oak floor in the hall when Emma arrived at the Greysons.

"Oh, you beautiful darling! Is he yours?" asked Emma, eagerly, of Tony Greyson.

"He's mine," answered Dick Cranford, stepping forward proudly. "Here, Wong! Come and say how do you do."

The chow rose to his feet with leisurely grace and came slowly across the hall.

"Oh, what a wonderful head he has! Would he mind if I stroked him?"

"No, he'd like it."

Emma laid her hand on the soft tawny head, and the chow yawned widely, displaying a large black tongue.

"Oh, how rude!" Emma laughed. "How I love his Oriental indifference. Did you have him as a puppy?"

Dick Cranford gazed at Wong affectionately, like a proud mother at her first-born child.

"Ever since he was a little fat round ball of fur," he answered tenderly.

"Chow puppies are the most wonderful things in the world!"

"I think so—I'm so glad someone else does, too."

Their eyes met, and they stood gazing at one another silently.

"Here—I say—do you two know each other?" interrupted Tony Greyson, who had been looking on, unable to get in a word. Er—Emma—this is Lord Cranford . . ."

They both laughed.

"Wong has already introduced us," said Dick Cranford solemnly.

Tony Greyson turned to his wife.

"Have you ever noticed that the world is divided into four races," he said. "Black, White,

Yellow, and chow lovers? It's like bein' a Mason or somethin'. Two people who seem fairly intelligent meet, and discover each owns a chow, and they immediately turn into a couple of imbeciles!"

"Emma!" called out Priscilla, laughing, "come and have tea immediately, and Dick shall tell you all about Wong's puppyhood, and when he teethed, while you're eating!"

That evening, when they assembled before dinner, Dick Cranford seemed to be puzzling over something. He kept counting the guests, and when Priscilla informally led the way in to dinner, he said in a low voice to Angela:

"I thought Miss Durville, the actress, was by way of turning up to-day?"

Angela turned a blank face to him.

"But—there she is!"

His eye fell on Emma, dressed demurely in black, and his look of astonishment as the truth dawned on him sent Angela off into peals of laughter.

"Oh, Emma!" she cried mischievously, "Dick is still looking for Miss Durville, the actress!"

Dick took his place at the table, covered with confusion.

"I didn't catch your name," he stammered, but his eyes told Emma that he found her difficult to connect with the stage.

"Did you expect me to have peroxide hair?" asked Emma, laughing. "I'm most awfully sorry to disappoint you."

Dick Cranford recovered his self-possession with an effort.

"You don't look like an actress, somehow," he said simply, and the whole dinner table roared at him; but Emma flashed an understanding little smile at him, and his heart suddenly beat very fast and he felt curiously light-headed. A queer thrill ran through him. It was as though he had received an electric shock.

That night, while Emma was brushing her hair preparatory to going to bed, there was a knock at her bedroom door and Angela came in.

"What do you think of Dick?" she asked abruptly.

"Lord Cranford? Oh, I think he's a darling," replied Emma, braiding her hair into two long shining plaits.

Angela blew smoke rings, pensively.

"I'm glad you like him," she said after a pause, "because I want you to marry him."

Emma turned round and faced her in astonishment.

"You want me to marry Lord Cranford?" she murmured.

"Yes. He would suit you very well. He's

awfully well off, and he's got a lovely place in Hampshire, and you'd be able to hunt all the winter, and come up to London for the season; you'd make an excellent Lady Cranford; you'd look lovely in the Cranford pearls, you'd have lots of children, and Dick would simply adore you!"

"It would never do; you must be mad."

"Babs Freeman has been trying for him for years. Oh, Emma, you'd make him such a much better wife, really you would! It would be much more fun staying with you for the hunt balls and the shooting parties than Babs!"

Emma shook her head.

"Why has he never married?" she asked inquisitively.

"He has always been shy with women. I suppose he has never been in love."

"He must be years older than me," murmured Emma pensively.

"Dick is only forty-five," said Angela eagerly.

"That's not old for a man."

Emma yawned and stretched herself.

"I'm afraid your little scheme is quite out of the question," she said drowsily. "Oh! Oh! I'm so sleepy. . . . Good-night, Angela, you impractical philanthropist."

"Good-night, but you will think it over, won't you, darling?" persisted Angela eagerly. "It's

imperative that Dick should marry, because if he doesn't have an heir, Cranford goes to David Seymour, his second cousin, who's an awfully nice boy, but the place has always belonged to a Cranford, and I'm sure Dick would rather it went to his own son."

"Well, I expect he'll marry Babs Freeman," said Emma sleepily. "So why worry?"

"Oh, but just think what charm and vitality your children would have, compared with hers," protested Angela earnestly.

"Oh, go to bed!" exclaimed Emma laughingly, turning her out of the room. "It's too late for a discussion on eugenics."

She shut the door on her and jumped into bed.

"The Cranford pearls," she murmured to herself, as she laid her head on the pillow. "I wonder what they're like?"

She fell asleep and dreamed of a string of pearls as large as marbles; her father clasped them round her throat, saying: "Pearls are very becoming to blondes," and Babs flew at her with a knife and severed the string, and the pearls fell to the ground with a loud crash.

She awoke with a start, clutching her throat frenziedly, to find that she had knocked over the tray of early-morning tea on the little table beside her bed!

CHAPTER IX

ON the following day they motored over to some races near Bath, all in a state of great excitement because Dick Cranford had a horse running there. Emma had never been on a race-course before, and it was all new and thrilling to her. The clamour of the bookies, the thud of the horses' hoofs on the turf, the slim, dapper jockeys—it all fascinated her. When she discovered that the name of Lord Cranford's chestnut filly was "Gallery Girl" her excitement knew no bounds.

"Oh, please, will you put on a pound for me? You see, it is such a coincidence that I feel certain she couldn't possibly lose!"

The house-party admitted that it really was a coincidence, and they all backed "Gallery Girl," partly out of compliment to Emma, partly because they had great faith in Dick Cranford.

"'Gallery Girl' four to one! Four to one 'Gallery Girl'!" bellowed the bookies, and Emma handed out a one-pound note, feeling this was the most reckless thing she had ever done in her life.

"I've put a whole pound on!" she exclaimed, aghast at her own temerity, and they all laughed at her.

Emma turned pale with excitement during the race. She only stood to lose a pound, but somehow, in an absurd, superstitious way, she connected the filly with herself, and she felt that if "Gallery Girl" could only win it would mean a successful career to Emma Durville. It filled her with astonishment and admiration that Dick Cranford could take it so calmly. He held field-glasses to his eyes, in hands that never trembled, whilst she, Emma, was shaking all over at his side.

"She's on the railings now, Tony," he observed casually, and Emma held her breath.

The thud of the horses' hoofs came nearer.

"It's a damned good race," added Dick Cranford.

"She's beaten!" exclaimed Tony Greyson. Then he gasped out: "No, by God! she leads!"

They rounded the bend, all in a bunch; then the chestnut filly pushed forward, and as they thundered past the winning-post "Gallery Girl" was leading by a neck.

Dick Cranford smiled at Emma's enthusiasm.

"You child!" he said in a low voice; then he walked away to lead in "Gallery Girl."

He was quite unmoved by his victory, and Emma felt convinced he would have looked exactly the same even if he had lost, standing there so carelessly, so unself-consciously, his grey homburg

tilted over his eyes to shield them from the sun, and a cigarette between his lips. Emma watched him talking gently to "Gallery Girl," patting her steaming flanks, and as he strode after the little jockey to superintend the weighing in, she noted approvingly his broad, flat shoulders and his slim hips.

"He walks like a boy of twenty-five," she said to herself. "I wouldn't mind being married to him a bit."

Emma declared that she adored racing a little later, when she was handed a crinkly five-pound note.

"Is this the first time in your life that you have ever been to a race meeting?" asked Babs Freeman with a covert sneer.

Emma, though she knew it was silly, felt herself blushing.

"Yes," she replied shortly.

Dick came instantly to her rescue.

"She hasn't had much time to attend many," he said, smiling down at her. "Children don't go racing."

Babs Freeman turned away. Dick, usually so kind and polite, had snubbed her. A lump rose to her throat, and the gay scene swam before her eyes in a haze of misery.

"I wish I'd never come," she said to herself.

"I can't think what's come over him. He's quite different to me somehow."

As they were leaving the paddock Emma stumbled over an uneven piece of ground, and Dick Cranford caught her by the arm just in time to prevent her from falling.

"I wonder you can walk in those absurdly high heels," remarked Babs Freeman with pursed lips. "I never wear heels in the country."

Emma extended a small arched foot, neatly shod in brown crocodile, and placed it purposely beside Babs Freeman's heavy brogue shoe, devoid of heel and studded with large nails, and it must be said that Emma's was not the one that suffered in comparison.

"I wish I could wear shoes like yours," she said sweetly. "They are so much more sensible, but I can't wear English shapes—I have to go to Pinet in Bond Street."

"I get mine at Peter Yapp's," replied Babs coldly.

Dick Cranford was staring at Emma's little crocodile shoes.

"What tiny feet you've got!" he remarked, smiling, looking from hers to Babs Freeman's, and the comparison was obvious.

During the homeward journey Emma was conscious of a wave of hatred exuding from the

corner of the car where Babs was sitting in stony silence. It made her particularly gay and talkative, and she kept Dick in fits of laughter until they reached home.

When they got back, as she was changing into tennis things, she heard the voices of Babs and Tim Nestor floating through the open window, and she thought she caught her name. Feeling rather ashamed of herself, but unable to resist her burning curiosity to know what they were talking about, she leaned out of her window and listened.

"I can't say I'm bowled over by her charm," exclaimed Babs Freeman bitterly. "I may be unappreciative, but I'm afraid I don't admire pop-eyes and a double chin."

Emma, boiling with indignation, heard Nestor's deprecating laugh.

"Oh, I say! Isn't that a bit too hard on the girl? She hasn't got a double chin, you know!"

"Well, she will have, in a few years' time."

"And hang it all, you know, her eyes are really rather attractive. . . ."

"Oh? So you are one of her victims?"

The scorn in Babs' voice was withering.

"No, no!" protested Nestor hastily, then, lowering his voice confidentially: "But between ourselves, don't you think Dick Cranford is rather *épris*?"

“Dick?” Babs’ voice waxed shriller. “Why, he simply loathes the stage! He’s the very last person to be victimized by a common little *poseuse*! I expect her people live in Balham, or Clapham, or somewhere impossible. She’s thoroughly middle-class! Poor Dick—give him a chance!”

Emma drew her head in sharply; she had heard more than enough.

“‘Poor Dick—give him a chance!’” she repeated softly to herself as she put the finishing touches to her appearance in front of the long mirror. A curious smile was on her lips, and she gazed at the reflection in the glass with a fixed intensity. “Poor Babs!” she sighed, as she turned away.

When once Emma made up her mind to do a thing, she lost no time accomplishing it, and by the end of her week’s visit at Southlands, whatever Dick himself might have thought, no one else in the house-party entertained any doubt about Emma’s conquest. Even to the most casual observer he appeared absolutely and completely hers.

It was her last evening and they were strolling round the garden together after dinner. It was a dark, starry, breathless August night, and the heavy scent of the stocks and the mignonette, mingled with the smell of Dick’s cigar, was

wafted to Emma's nostrils on the faintest of summer breezes, filling her with sensuous delight.

"Will you let me call you Emma?" he asked her suddenly.

"Why, of course! I've been simply longing to call you Dick ever since I met you!"

Her laugh, joyous as a child's, sent a pang through his heart. An overwhelming impatience at his age tore at him suddenly, for the first time in his life. He glanced sideways at her profile, faintly outlined in the dusk, and wondered how old she was.

"Do you like being on the stage?" he asked abruptly.

"I do, rather," she replied hesitatingly. "What made you ask?"

"Only that you seem to me to be so unfitted for the life—so remote from it all, somehow."

Emma, quick to take up her cue, sighed pathetically.

"I had to earn my own living somehow, and the stage seemed the easiest way."

"I wish to goodness . . ." He stopped abruptly.

"What were you going to say?"

"Nothing."

"Oh, do say it! Please! I hate unfinished sentences."

"What a baby you are!"

"Oh, no, I'm not. How old do you think I am?"

"Eighteen? Nineteen?"

Emma laughed.

"Oh, dear, how dreadfully disillusioned you will be when I tell you the truth." She stood beside him on the shadowy lawn with her hands clasped under her chin. "Dick!" she cried in mock tragic accents, "I'm twenty-three!"

He groaned.

"Oh, my God! And you call that old! I'd give all I possess to be twenty-three again."

"Everything you possess?" echoed Emma, her thoughts leaping instantly to the Cranford pearls.

"But you're not old."

"I'm forty-five."

"That's the right age for a man."

"The right age for what?" he asked sharply.

Emma blushed in the darkness.

"Oh—um—for everything," she responded vaguely.

A bat flitted by and she ducked her head swiftly.

"Are you frightened of bats, Emma?" he asked tenderly.

"Yes, I always think they're going to fly into my hair."

"I won't let them."

He touched her hair lightly as he spoke, with unsteady fingers.

"Will you come and see me one day?" asked Emma, ignoring his shy caress.

"Yes. But I shall hate it."

"Oh, how rude!"

He threw the end of his cigar on the ground and stamped on it savagely.

"I hate to think of you having anything to do with the stage."

"But I'm a very good actress," said Emma gaily, pirouetting beside him. "You'd fall in love with me if only you could see me as 'Lizzie.' I'm quite irresistible!"

"Are you?"

A large spot of rain fell on Emma's uncovered head.

"We must go in, it's started to rain."

He caught hold of her hand.

"Emma—you haven't called me Dick yet."

"Yes, I have."

"I didn't hear you. Say it again."

"Dick."

She said it slowly and mockingly with her lips close to his, then she ran across the lawn into the house.

The others were playing bridge; Babs Freeman looked up as Emma flitted through the French window, and smiled in a sickly fashion.

Emma noticed how yellow her complexion looked at night, and decided that her dress did not become her. She felt a sudden pity for her; all her anger had melted away; it was characteristic of Emma that she had already forgotten that she had originally set out to make Dick Cranford fall in love with her in order to spite poor Babs.

Dick followed her into the room and his face looked strangely pale in the artificial light.

"If it isn't awfully rude, I'd like to go to bed, Priscilla," said Emma. "I've got to start work again to-morrow."

She said good-night all round and Dick followed her outside the door.

"Emma . . . ?"

She paused, with her hand on the oak banister. Dick fixed his eyes on her little satin slippers, and noticed the dark ring round them, where they had been stained with dew.

"May I come and see you in London?"

"I'd love to show you my little flat in King's Road, but it's a long way out of your beat, and I expect you'll forget the address."

"I shan't forget. . . . Good-night, Emma. . . ."

"Good-night, Dick."

He stooped quickly and pressed his lips to the hand lying on the banister, and Emma ran upstairs with tears in her eyes.

She felt suddenly frightened.

CHAPTER X

EMMA had only been in London a few days when a messenger boy came round one morning with a large hamper addressed to Miss Emma Durville. There was a rustling noise inside the basket, and when Emma opened the lid, a fat bundle of coffee-coloured fur jumped out and proceeded to lick Emma's astonished face all over with a soft black tongue. Attached to the light harness round its body was a note written from the Bachelors' Club.

"DEAR EMMA,

"Will you accept a new friend? She is a lady of high degree, and I think when she is grown up she will make a good wife for Wong.

"Yours sincerely,

"DICK."

Emma immediately sat down and wrote the following:

"Oh, my dear,

"How shall I ever be able to thank you? I am going to call her Sung. If you could come to tea to-morrow, we might have the christening then, and you could be her godfather.

"Yours with many, many thanks,

"EMMA."

She spent the whole day playing with the chow puppy; she could hardly bear to tear herself away from it to go down to the theatre that evening. It slept in Emma's room, and awakened her in the middle of the night by whining because it felt lonely; so she lifted it up on her bed, where it pounced on imaginary rats under the bed-clothes, worried her hair-ribbon, licked her nose all over, finally snuggled up under her chin, and went to sleep.

The following afternoon Peggy and she tidied up the sitting-room, and filled the two tall vases with some beautiful yellow roses which had been sent to Emma at the theatre on the previous night.

"They are lovely!" exclaimed Peggy. "Who gave them to you?"

"I haven't the least idea," replied Emma. "Someone sends them to me every week." She laughed. "An unknown admirer—how exciting!"

"It looks very nice now, Emma," said Peggy, with her head on one side, studying the room critically from every aspect.

She was by far the most excited of the two, for Emma was more amused than impressed by the idea of her tea-party.

Punctually at half past four the bell rang, and Dick Cranford was announced, followed by Wong.

The flat was delightfully cool after the hot

London streets, cool and gay, and as he sank into a deep comfortable arm-chair, Dick breathed a sigh of relief. Somehow, right at the back of his mind, there had lain a dread of this visit. He had not expected Emma's friend, Peggy Samson, to be so obviously well-bred; he had been obsessed by a fear that she might wear imitation paste combs in her hair and a profusion of gold bangles round thick, red wrists. But Peggy was quietly dressed in a knitted silk frock; her smooth, dark hair was simply drawn back from her forehead; and her accents were gentle and educated. He had half expected the furniture to be cheap and ornate and over-plentiful; but as his eyes wandered round the room, they fell on a Queen Anne walnut writing-table, a black divan, heaped up with orange cushions, a small Chippendale book-case, a cottage piano, two arm-chairs, and on the floor a Persian rug. His greatest dread had been seeing Emma in her own environment. He had been so afraid of finding her surrounded by flashy, loud-voiced young men; lying on a sofa in a tea-gown, smoking dozens of cigarettes, and drinking whiskies-and-sodas instead of tea—recollections of his youthful days supplied the details of the scene! He looked approvingly across at Emma, pouring out his tea, so feminine and so domesticated, in a puritanical grey frock,

the summer sunshine streaming down upon her golden head, bowed so prettily over the silver tea-pot.

Wong stretched himself out on the floor, and good-naturedly allowed the puppy to pounce round him and leap on the top of him.

"Did you furnish the flat yourselves?" asked Dick, gazing round admiringly.

"Oh, yes, we picked up things quite cheaply in funny little shops along King's Road, didn't we, Peggy?"

Peggy was loyal.

"Oh, I didn't do much, Lord Cranford," she said eagerly. "Emma did it all. She's got such wonderful taste."

Emma laughed.

"I had to keep it strictly within bounds though, because our means were very limited, weren't they, Peggy?"

"I think it's simply delightful!" exclaimed Dick Cranford enthusiastically.

A photograph on the walnut writing-table suddenly caught his eye. He walked over to it and looked at it furtively. It was the head of a very handsome young man with the face of the Belvedere Apollo. Dick stood with his back turned to Emma, but Peggy, opposite, could see his face from where she sat.

"Who is that?" he asked carelessly; then suddenly realizing that his question might seem impertinent: "I think it's someone I know," he added mendaciously.

Peggy held her breath as Emma answered in a low voice:

"It's my husband."

"Your *husband*?"

He swung round and his voice vibrated through the room.

"He was killed in the War," Emma added hastily. "He was in the Navy."

Peggy had seen Dick's face before he had time to control his expression, and she felt suddenly weak and trembling at the knees. It seemed so awful that anyone could care like that.

He returned to the photograph, and Peggy got up and left the room. Neither of them noticed her departure.

"I never knew you had been married before," said Dick, in a low, controlled voice.

"We were married in September before the end of the War, and we had three weeks together before he joined his destroyer. I never saw him again. He was killed just before the Armistice."

"What was his name?" asked Dick, still in those quiet, muffled tones.

"Maurice Smith. We always called him

‘Nibs’ . . .” She broke off nervously, and there was an awkward pause. “Come and be christened, Sung!” she cried suddenly, throwing off her air of sadness and becoming instantly as gay as a child.

She lifted the puppy on her knee and smothered its face with kisses.

“Now, Dick, you must swear to renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil, because you’re her godfather!” Dipping her forefinger in her cup, she sprinkled the puppy’s head with tea. “I baptize thee ‘Sung’,” she said solemnly, and the puppy barked and tried to bite her nose.

Dick was rather shocked.

“You oughtn’t to make fun of sacred things,” he began with difficulty, torn between his natural impulses and the fear that she might think him a prig.

“Oh, I’m so sorry!” exclaimed Emma, full of compunction. “I didn’t realize they were sacred words. You see, I was very badly brought up. My father is an atheist, and so I never had any religious teaching at all.”

“Haven’t you ever been to church?” asked Dick.

“Sometimes—to Roman Catholic churches,” she answered carelessly, playing with the puppy. “Father says the services in the ordinary Protes-

tant churches are so ugly. He says Beauty is the only religion that counts."

"But you — yourself?" stammered Dick anxiously.

"I don't know . . . I think there's something very wonderful at the root of things . . ." she murmured vaguely. Looking up she encountered his worried gaze. "I was married in a Protestant church, of course," she added as a consolation.

She gave Sung a piece of chocolate cake and laughed at her greedy delight. Dick stood looking down at her with love and longing in his eyes. "Did she love her husband?" he wondered, and as he looked at her he found it hard to believe that she had indeed been married, for although she struck him as the most intensely feminine creature he had ever met, there hung about her something essentially young and virginal.

"I didn't know—I couldn't guess you had been married before," he murmured, almost reproachfully.

"I—I'm sorry," said Emma foolishly.

"I thought 'Durville' was your real name."

"It's my maiden name. My father is Nicholas Durville, the bone specialist——"

Dick interrupted her eagerly:

"Nicholas Durville your father? But I've

known him all my life ! What's become of him ? I haven't heard of him for ages."

"He had to give up his work, because he had heart trouble. We left London when I was twelve, and since then he's buried himself in a deadly dull little village in Devonshire. It's an awful waste of a good brain."

"Yes, indeed ! I remember him up at Cambridge. He was a brilliant fellow, but——"

He broke off, and looked confused.

"He was sent down because they disapproved of his atheistical doctrines," Emma continued calmly.

Dick sighed, and Emma noticed that his face looked drawn and haggard.

"Oh, Emma ! That just shows how old I am ! Fancy me being up at the 'Varsity with your father !"

"You look much younger than Daddy."

He walked away from her and stood with his back turned.

"I'm going up to Scotland to-morrow, Emma," he said abruptly.

She looked up sharply and put Sung on the ground.

"For how long ?"

"For about six weeks, I think."

His voice sounded weary.

"Oh, dear! Then you won't see me in *The Knight in the Gallery*, because it's coming off in another few weeks!"

She made no effort to disguise her disappointment, but stared at him in dismay.

"I was there last night," he answered.

"Oh, but why didn't you let me know? Why didn't you come round? What did you think of me?"

"I thought you were—good."

Emma pouted.

"You aren't enthusiastic, are you?"

"Emma, I must go. Good-bye."

He held out his hand, and as she rose she noticed that his eyes were full of pain.

"Good-bye, I wish you weren't going away to-morrow."

"I think I need a change. I haven't been feeling awfully fit lately."

"I'm sorry," she paused, finding no words, and overcome by a sense of failure. "I haven't thanked you enough yet for giving me darling Sung," she went on, struggling to overcome his coldness.

"I hope she will behave herself, as I feel responsible for my godchild," he said, trying to smile. "Good-bye."

He walked slowly out of the room, followed by Wong, and Emma ran upstairs in search of Peggy.

"Well?" asked the latter eagerly.

"He's gone. He's going up to Scotland to-morrow for six weeks. I've done badly with him. It was telling him about Nibs that did it. He was very chilly to me just now."

"Oh, Emma!"

"What are you looking at me like that for?"

"He's in love with you!"

"That's just it—he isn't! I thought he was at Southlands, but to-day——" She stuck out her under lip and looked sulky.

Peggy looked at her keenly.

"Are you—would you marry him if he asked you, Emma?"

"Good heavens, no! He's old enough to be my father, and besides—he won't ask me!"

Peggy said no more, but she knew, what Dick himself was only just beginning to realize, that he was madly in love with Emma. Something restrained her from imparting this knowledge to Emma, for she felt that she had discovered it by unfair means—it was almost like reading a letter one was never intended to see—and she felt it would be dishonourable to speak of it.

CHAPTER XI

At the beginning of September, without saying a word to Peggy, Emma arranged to take lessons at a riding school. She sneaked off there three times a week, and one morning Peggy, walking in the Park, to her amazement caught sight of Emma, in a well-cut habit, mounted on a large brown hack. Emma saw her too, and cantered past her, to show off, laughing at Peggy's astonishment. Peggy stood by the railings with her mouth open.

"Why didn't you say anything to me about it?" she asked in injured tones at lunch.

"I wanted to keep it as a surprise for you," said Emma, to pacify her.

"But you told me you couldn't ride only the other day!"

"Nor I could. I have only just learned."

Peggy opened her eyes wide.

"Why on earth did you want to learn to ride? Riding lessons are awfully expensive."

Emma smiled down at her plate.

"Oh, I don't know. I thought it might be useful. One never knows. . . ."

"Oh, Emma!"

"What d'you mean?" demanded Emma sharply.

"Oh, nothing!"

But Peggy looked as if she knew a lot, and Emma realized her camouflage had been unsuccessful. Although she adopted an air of disarming innocence she could feel herself blushing.

"Well, I only hope he'll appreciate all your trouble," observed Peggy.

"My poor Peggy — you are very vulgar!" returned Emma calmly, and the subject dropped.

Towards the end of September the Benjamins invited Emma down to stay with them at Smallborough, a seaside village on the Kentish coast.

As Benjy had been in London on the Saturday for a Board meeting he motored Emma down on Sunday morning in his Rolls Royce, and furtively squeezed her hand under the rug whenever she afforded him the opportunity. Emma thought him a disgusting old bore, but she put up with him for the sake of Sadie, whom she genuinely loved, and for his immense wealth.

"I can smell the sea!" she exclaimed suddenly, as they spun down the long asphalt road, hedged on either side with privet.

All round them lay the marshes, a flat, sweeping expanse of country, stretching along the horizon as far as the eye could see. A little clump of trees broke the line immediately behind them,

and a white windmill stood silhouetted, clear-cut and absurdly like a toy, against the blue, serene, unclouded sky. Before them stretched a gaunt, stark row of grey lodging-houses, staring across the Channel, in a grim, unblinking, hideous line. Then they came full upon the sea, majestic and tranquil in the morning light. They drove along the sea-front, past the long row of houses, and pulled up before a big red house with green shutters, facing the sea and backing on the golf links. As Emma scrambled out of the car, stiff and numb after her long journey, a curious conviction came to her that she had done it all before, followed swiftly by a feeling of intense happiness. A lump of joy rose in her throat.

"Something wonderful is going to happen to me here," she told herself as she followed Benjy into the house. "I feel it in my bones!"

Sadie came running towards her, with outstretched arms, followed by three yapping little pekingeses.

"How lovely to see you, darling!" she cried, kissing her warmly. "I think you know everybody."

Emma swept her inquiring gaze round the party, who were just going in to lunch: Cynthia Lovitt, who greeted her affectionately, and her rather boring husband; Hugo Sefton, smiling

flirtatiously at her; Hughie Trevor, paler and more emaciated than ever, in golfing tweeds that looked too big for him; Angela Lumley, who kissed her hand to her in a beautiful languorous gesture; and, standing behind the group, a tall, slim boy who was a stranger to her.

"I know them all except him," said Emma in her husky contralto, pointing to the boy whom she took to be an Etonian of about sixteen or seventeen.

"Why, I thought you knew each other. Hasn't Dick ever introduced you?" said Sadie. "It's David Seymour."

Emma stared at him in astonishment.

"Are you Dick's cousin?" she exclaimed, extending her hand. "I thought——"

She broke off, confused.

"You're quite right. I am his cousin, but not his first cousin," said a croaky voice, like that of a boy whose voice is just breaking. "My father and Dick are first cousins. How do you do?"

A slim, firm hand grasped hers, and she looked up into a brown boyish face, with long almond-shaped brown eyes, a beautiful, almost girlish-looking mouth, a square, determined chin, and a low, smooth brow under a mop of untidy brown hair.

They went in to lunch, and Emma found herself next to him.

"I know your cousin quite well," she began, as a trite opening to the conversation.

"Yes, I know. I made him promise to introduce me, but he's rather a dog-in-the-manger about you!"

"Oh," thought Emma, "then he does deign to speak of me sometimes!"

"He likes me to call him Cousin Dick, you know," the croaky voice went on. "But it would be so jolly absurd—Dick is so young for his age—sometimes I feel years older!"

Emma confessed, laughingly, that she had taken him for a schoolboy.

"I'm nearly twenty!"

"You look sixteen! I thought you were still at Eton."

"You are rude, you know," he protested, and Emma noticed that when he smiled his eyes narrowed up into small slits in a network of almost invisible wrinkles, and she observed that his cheeks were powdered over with a number of golden-brown freckles.

Hugo Sefton leaned towards her and engaged her deeply in stage-talk. After an excellent lunch, followed by a wonderfully good cigar, he was in good spirits, and as he led Emma out into the garden he confided to her that for some time past he had been thinking of giving a season

of Shakespeare, and that his pet fancy was to see her as "Rosalind." Emma, instantly visualizing herself in tights, was inflamed with a desire to act the rôle.

"It's a wonderful part," murmured Hugo Sefton, dreamily.

"Yes, wonderful!" echoed Emma, thinking how well she would look in tights.

"You've just the voice for it!" he went on.

"And the figure," thought Emma.

"But"—he laid his hand very heavily on her shoulder—"remember, *As You Like It* is a very different proposition from *The Knight in the Gallery*—Shakespeare is a very different thing altogether from Gordon Hereford. To act Shakespeare you should live Shakespeare, dream Shakespeare and think Shakespeare. Yes! and I believe you are capable of it, my dear. What do you say?"

"Oh, Sir Hugo! It would be wonderful!" breathed Emma, pretending to be in a rhapsody.

She submitted to his semi-fatherly embrace, shutting out her disgust behind closed lids.

"How I hate amorous old men!" she said to herself afterwards. "Kissing ought to be the privilege of youth alone!"

And there came to her mind a recollection of a brown boy's face, smothered in golden freckles.

“That boy now—I wouldn’t mind kissing him,” she thought suddenly.

She remembered Benjy’s stolen osculations on the way down, and she shuddered. Still—she was prepared to put up with anything if only it meant a contract with Hugo Sefton at the end of the run of *The Knight in the Gallery*; and after all, this pathetic yearning after youth, this greedy, furtive love-making of old men—she supposed it was all in the day’s work, and, shrugging her shoulders philosophically, she joined the others, who were waiting for her to complete a foursome.

Emma had played golf ever since her earliest childhood and drove a good ball for a woman. She and Hughie Trevor took on Angela and David Seymour. Hughie and Angela being the weaker players, it meant that David Seymour and Emma drove at the longest holes.

“She does look jolly driving,” thought David, watching Emma’s easy swing and the poise of her lissom body.

She sliced her drive and the ball went flying into the rough.

“Gawd!” she exclaimed, under her breath, quoting unconsciously from her part in *The Knight in the Gallery*.

David laughed croakily.

“Oh, I love ‘Lizzie’! Do go on!”

"Have you seen the show, then?" asked Emma.

"Rather! I've been to it nine times."

He drove off, and Emma and he walked towards the other two, who were waiting for them on the other side of the bunker.

"Why have you been so often?" inquired Emma, full of curiosity.

He shot her a quick look out of the corner of slanting, almond-shaped eyes.

"Because I love 'Lizzie?'" he replied, and Emma felt the warm colour stealing into her cheeks.

It was quite an ordinary remark, and yet it made her feel suddenly self-conscious and unwontedly shy.

The next hole was a short one, and Emma and David sat down by the side of the green and waited for the others to drive.

"I'm going to call you David," said Emma abruptly, playing with the fringe of her scarf.

"Thank you, Emma," he replied coolly.

Again Emma felt the blood mounting to her eyes—she could have shaken herself with vexation. Here was a mere child—an immature slip of a boy—causing her sophisticated heart to beat the faster by a look, a word, an intonation, and her blush deepened with shame that she could behave so stupidly.

"I said I was going to call you David because you are only a boy, and it would be absurd for me to call you Mr. Seymour. But——"

"And you are only a girl, so it would be equally absurd of me to call you Miss Durville."

"Do you realize how impertinent you are? You are nineteen. I am—well, nearly old enough to be your mother."

"You're twenty-three, nearly four years older than me, that's all."

"Oh—in years! But in actual experience a woman of twenty-three is . . ."

The others joined them, looking rather crest-fallen.

"Oh, David, will you ever forgive me?" cried Angela in tragic tones.

"For what?" inquired David, scrambling leisurely to his feet.

"I've gone and put you in that beastly little bunker on the right! Didn't you see?"

"I wasn't looking," David confessed.

Hughie was apologizing to Emma for the same crime. He said Angela had put him off by fidgiting on the tee whilst he was addressing the ball.

"She asked me if I could lend her a safety-pin just as I was swinging!" he explained.

"Oh, Hughie!" called out Angela reproach-

fully, "I told you my suspender had bust, and you told me to pin my stocking to my——"

"Hush! I'm surprised at you, Angela!" broke in David. "Fortunately your partner is a better golfer than you, and has managed to put you gracefully on the green, out of the bunker, whither you must have aimed deliberately, while wrangling vulgarly about your suspender."

At the next hole David held out his hand for Emma's ball.

"I'll make your tee for you," he said, and something in his voice aroused Emma's sense of independence.

"No, I like making my own," she protested. "And anyway the caddy would do it if I asked."

But David kneeled down and seized a small handful of sand.

"Give me your ball," he said peremptorily.

"I shan't—I've already told you I want to make my own tee."

David looked up patiently.

"Well, we're only losing time," he observed.

Emma turned her back on him, and proceeded to tee up her ball in a different spot. David shot out a long arm, and seized the ball off the tee which she was laboriously shaping, and Emma grabbed his hand with both hers.

"Give me back my ball instantly," she cried

out, trying to unlock his strong brown fingers which were clenched round the ball.

Without a word he caught both her wrists in his left hand, and she struggled vainly, with futile gestures, but she was utterly powerless.

“Let me—let me go at once! How dare you?” she cried, in such a temper that she would have bitten his hand but for the knowledge that the caddies were looking on, grinning, from the hillock on the left.

It made it all the worse to know how undignified she must look, and there was nothing for it but to give in. David’s grip relaxed, and she rose to her feet in silence and drove a beautiful straight ball down the course. Then, without waiting for his drive, she marched away from him, with her head in the air. It surprised her that she could feel so angry; she was trembling all over, and when she glanced down at the red mark round her smarting wrists, she nearly burst into tears of rage.

The rest of the round was very dull. Emma never spoke to David, and if he addressed a remark to her she pretended not to hear. They halved the match on the last green, and as they were walking towards the house David fell behind with Emma.

“I say—aren’t you ever going to speak to me again?” he began, fidgeting nervously with a button on his coat. “Won’t you forgive me?”

At the sound of his voice, low and persuasive, Emma found her anger melting away in a rush.

"I—you made me very angry," she murmured, trying to sound indignant. "I hate all that kind of thing—horse-play!"

"I can't think why I went on like that. It isn't a bit like me," he continued earnestly. "I'm not a bit like that, really. Do forgive me."

Emma glanced at his boyish profile, down-bent, his thick, short, black eyelashes touching his cheek, his face very grave and sweet. Something about the way in which his hair grew at the nape of his neck made her heart beat faster.

"Oh, what a darling he is!" she cried inwardly; it seemed to her that he had touched an unknown chord inside her—she supposed it was the maternal instinct.

She laughed.

"Of course I forgive you," she said lightly. "I was silly to be so cross, but you made me look so undignified!"

They shook hands solemnly by the garden gate, and went in to tea good friends.

When she came down before dinner that evening, she saw him look up at her across the room. His eyes travelled over her creamy bosom and shoulders, and down her softly curving bare arms. She felt suddenly shy; this boy unnerved her,

leaving her defenceless, with none of her *savoir-faire*; she became blushing, uncertain, confused; never before had anyone so deprived her of her self-assurance.

All through dinner they giggled together over absurd childish jokes, and their conversation was trite.

“Do you play bridge?” he asked her.

Emma nodded.

“I can’t, but I do.”

He caught the merry, teasing expression in her eyes, and he thought she was laughing at him.

“She thinks I’m a damned fool,” he told himself impatiently. “Hang it all, she must know I don’t care a brass farthing whether she plays bridge or not, but I can’t talk about the things I want to—I can’t tell her how wonderful she is—oh, curse all these blasted conventions!”

He wondered what she would say if he started talking to her as he really wished. How would he begin? “Please, I want you to tell me exactly what you think of me”? What would she say? Supposing she answered: “I think you’re a silly young fool,” or even worse: “I haven’t thought about you at all!” How awful!

He looked up and caught her gaze resting on him; the expression on her face had completely changed; her eyes were a deeper blue, bluer than

two moonlit pools in a dark forest, heavy-lidded, and brooding with a softness that was almost like tears. What was she thinking about? He slipped his hand into his trousers pocket and brought out a penny, which he solemnly laid on the table in front of her. Emma started and blushed. Then she shook her head and handed the penny back to him.

“You are very inquisitive, and not particularly respectful to your elders,” she remonstrated.

When she looked like that she was wonderful! He noticed that when she smiled she looked absurdly childish, but that in repose her face was passionate and rather sad. . . . Oh damn! Sadie had caught her eye, and now she would have to go . . . silly custom this! who wanted to stick here in the dining-room, in the thick, fuggy atmosphere of port and old brandy, and cigar smoke, and Benjy’s after-dinner stories? . . . As Emma got up she tripped over Hugo Sefton’s foot, and she sent David a flying smile—a little, intimate, private, very personal glance, that consoled him, before she passed out of the door.

When, after what seemed to David an interminable interval, they at length rose and joined the others, they found them strolling round the garden, just distinguishable in the dusk, Emma and Sadie arm-in-arm, Angela and Cynthia Lovitt

practising a new step on the lawn. Benjy suggested some bridge.

“Not for me—please let me stay out here!” Emma besought him, laying her hand on his arm. “The moon is just rising and it is such a perfect night!”

“I can refuse you nothing when you look like that!” said Benjy thickly.

Emma strolled through the garden on to the beach, and feasted her eyes on the yellow harvest moon, rising over the sea, making a silver pathway to her feet. She knew by the outline of the square shoulders at her side that David had followed her.

“Where do you think the little path leads to?” she asked him in a low voice.

“Shall we get in a boat and sail away together up the pathway to find out for ourselves?”

His cigarette-end glowed in the darkness, and she could see the tip of his chin and his blunt retroussé nose, reflected by the little light. His shoulder touched hers, and Emma caught her breath, strangely excited.

“I wonder what does lie beyond?” she said dreamily.

“I can tell you that,” grunted a facetious voice behind them, “France.”

Emma turned sharply. It was Hughie Trevor.

She took his arm, laughingly, and walked back into the garden.

"The others have gone in to play bridge," he complained. "I've quarrelled with Angela, and Hugo Sefton and I don't get on very well. I don't care about his taste in dress, and he doesn't like my personality—it is too delicate, too fine, for him. So I am forced to intrude on your moonlight philandering. I hope you don't bear me any malice?"

They were joined by Sefton and Angela.

"I think I'll go in and play the piano," observed Hughie. "Angela has been very rude to me, but I will drown my sorrows in sentimental music."

The strains of Rubenstein's Romance in E came wafting out to them through the open French windows; then he drifted into a sad, haunting little melody of his own.

"What is that called, Hughie?" Angela called out.

"Autumn Evening," came the reply in Hughie's high-pitched, querulous voice. "Can't you hear the rustling of the autumn leaves, falling to the ground, whispering and sighing to the wind? And smell the autumnal smell of burning peat and log fires and withered leaves?"

"It's very sad," said Emma, in her vibrating contralto.

"Yes," came Hughie's reply, floating through

the window. "The summer is over—and the lovers have to part!"

Emma shivered and glanced involuntarily at David, sitting on the ground at her feet, and she met his eyes fixed on her face in the dusk. A thrill went through her.

Hughie fell into a modern revue tune.

"Ah! Elsie Geoffrey's song!" said Hugo Sefton, humming the tune and beating time on his knee. "She's a wonder, that girl! Those cartwheels of hers—I never saw anything so graceful in my life!"

"I can turn cart-wheels," said Emma immediately.

"You can't!" Angela said.

Emma rose to her feet, and paused for an instant with her white arms stretched above her head. There was a whirl of pale draperies as she turned catherine-wheels all the way across the lawn.

"Bravo, bravo!" called out Hugo Sefton enthusiastically. "By Jove," he added, as Emma sank into her chair at his side, panting, "you're wasted in straight comedy! You ought to go into revue, you know!"

The marsh-mist had risen all over the links in the distance, ghostly and white, and it had suddenly grown chilly.

"Let's go in and play 'Racing Demon,'" suggested Angela.

As they were going into the house, Hugo Sefton pulled Emma back, behind the others.

"Give me a kiss," he whispered huskily.

Emma wrinkled up her face in disgust, and turned her cheek towards him perfunctorily, but just as he was stooping to kiss it, David, who had gone in with the others, suddenly flitted back again through the French window, and knocked Hugo Sefton into the flower-bed at the side.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" he said politely. "I didn't see you. I've left my cigarette-case out here, I think."

He stooped and hunted about the ground.

Emma stepped through the window into the drawing-room, smiling to herself, for she had seen David's cigarette-case gleaming in his hand, and she knew his sudden return was premeditated. She felt she loved him for it, and as Hugo Sefton followed her, frowning, Emma exchanged a quick, grateful glance with David over his head.

That night, just as Emma was dropping off to sleep, a face rose out of the darkness, close to hers, a brown, boyish face, with long, narrow, slanting eyes, sweet curved lips, and a square, obstinate chin. She put out her hands swiftly, to find nothing there. The face had vanished, but it haunted her dreams all night.

CHAPTER XII

THE sea looked so tempting from her window in the morning, so calm, so blue, so altogether delicious, that Emma had an overpowering longing to bathe. She hastily donned a bathing-dress and, flinging on a green wrapper, she crept out of the silent house, across the white, dusty road, over the strip of withered grass, on to the pebbly beach. The sky was a vivid blue, the billowy white clouds like snowy mountains, rising up on the horizon; and the little bay looked unreal, mysterious, dreamlike, in the morning mist, in a mirage. The waves crept forward timidly in the sunshine, and then retired, sucking back the shingle with a rustling, rattling sound.

Emma drew a deep breath. There was a spice of adventure about being alone, face to face with such a morning as this. Suddenly she heard a scrunching noise on the shingle behind her. Turning quickly, she found David standing beside her, in a purple dressing-gown, with tousled hair falling over his forehead, and sleepy, half-shut eyes. He glanced at her shyly.

"The sea looked so tempting from my window," he said, half apologetically, rubbing his knuckles

in his eyes like a sleepy child, "I felt I simply couldn't resist it."

"It must have been telepathy," said Emma gaily, advancing to the edge of the water and testing the temperature gingerly with one foot. "Oo ! it's so cold !"

David rushed in, splashing her all over, and swam out to sea. Emma watched his muscular shoulders, heaving out of the water at every stroke, wet and gleaming in the sunshine, and as she ducked and wriggled about in the buoyant water, her limbs aching with the cold, her nostrils dilated with the strong, invigorating morning air, again she felt that curious lump of joy rising in her throat and a glow of immense happiness tingling through her body. Her life in London, her social success, her career as an actress, it all seemed to recede from her, and as it faded into the mirage, she felt that nothing mattered, nothing counted, except this one vivid moment in her life. David came swimming towards her.

"You must go in now," he panted. "It's too cold to stay in any longer."

Rather to her surprise she found herself obeying him meekly. They waded in silently, side by side, and he wrapped her green peignoir round her shoulders. They scrambled up the beach and hobbled over the white road. There was not a

soul in sight but the milkman, who came clattering down the road in his cart.

"I'll race you dressing," said Emma, as they went in to the house.

"All right. But I'll win, you know. You've got so many little hooks and things, and you've got to do your hair."

"I bet you half a crown I'll be down at the same time as you! No cheating, mark you! You mustn't skip shaving—oh! perhaps you don't have to shave?"

"Of course I shave!" exclaimed David, flushing indignantly. "What age do you take me for?"

Emma laid her hand on his arm. Her upturned face was rosy and wet, and it struck him that she was the first pretty woman he had ever known to look attractive in a bathing-cap.

"Oh, David darling—do forgive me!" she murmured mockingly. "I'm afraid I've offended your manly dignity."

She ran upstairs and flung on her clothes as fast as she could, but for all her haste she only arrived in the hall at the same time as David.

"Dead heat!" she exclaimed breathlessly, leaping perilously from the top of the stairs to the bottom.

David glanced down at her ankles, and suddenly began to chuckle.

"What are you giggling about?" she asked.

She followed the direction of his gaze and perceived for the first time that she had put on one brown stocking and one grey, so she reluctantly handed him half a crown.

As it still lacked a full hour to breakfast, David proposed a brisk walk to the grocer's shop and there they spent the two-and-six on chocolate, which they devoured on the homeward journey.

After breakfast Angela and Hughie tried to persuade Emma to play golf. She looked across the room at David and caught an expression of appeal in his half-shut eyes.

"No, I don't feel like golf to-day," she replied. "I bathed before breakfast, and it always puts my eye out."

"Well, you'll play, David, won't you?" said Angela; but he shook his head regretfully.

"Alas! I've got to write some very important letters," he said.

"Oh, nonsense! You can do that this afternoon," retorted Angela impatiently.

"No. Must catch the twelve o'clock post," said David, and Angela, shrugging her shoulders, went off in search of Hugo Sefton and Sadie, to complete a foursome.

David settled himself at the writing-table in the corner of the morning-room and seemed

very much preoccupied when the golfing party set off in a few minutes' time. Emma curled herself up on the sofa near the window, holding a writing-pad and a fountain-pen on her knees. David scratched away busily, and Emma amused herself by drawing faces all over the page. They all had retroussé noses and blunt, square chins. Then she grew bored with them and yawned loudly.

David jumped.

"Oh! I thought you had gone out with the others," he said, with elaborate carelessness, slightly overdone.

"You didn't," retorted Emma. "You knew I was sitting here all the time!"

David laughed and stretched his long arms and legs.

"Oh—oh! I'm tired of writing—let's go for a walk," he said.

They sneaked furtively out of the house and walked along by the edge of the sea, until they left the unsightly row of houses far behind, and came upon the sandhills, smooth, white slopes among large tufts of coarse, greeny-blue grass.

Emma threw herself down in one of the warm sandy hollows.

"Oh, how lovely!"

David stretched out his long slim limbs beside

her, and clasped his hands over his eyes for shelter from the sun. He heaved a sigh of contentment.

"Oh dear!" said Emma, echoing his sigh. "I do hate to think of going back to the theatre to-night."

David said nothing.

"I adore this place," continued Emma, "it makes me feel so well, and so young, and so gay. I never think at all down here. I can't, somehow."

"I expect it's the air," suggested David, glancing at her under the shadow of his hands, and something in his voice caused her to add hastily:

"Yes, of course, it's the sea air."

She felt curiously breathless. What did he mean?

"Won't you like going back to the theatre to-night?" asked David, shutting his eyes as if he were going to sleep.

"Oh—I daresay I shall when the time comes, but, you see, now, it all seems so far away, and so remote from the 'me' that's here, which is a quite different 'me' to the one in London," explained Emma, rather involved.

"What is the Emma in London like?"

"Oh, very scheming, and clever, and far-sighted, and worldly, and—oh, horrid!"

"I don't think I should care for her."

"Oh, no, you'd hate her. For one thing she'd be much too grown-up and too clever for you."

"Thank you."

"Oh, don't be cross. I mean——"

"You mean I'm a fool, I suppose?"

"No, not a fool, David—only a baby! But you can't help being only eighteen, can you?"

"Nineteen!"

"Nineteen, then! Now tell me about Oxford. Do you like it?" she began propitiatingly.

"Oh, it's all right."

"Do you have fun?"

"Sometimes."

"What are you specially good at, David? Are you going to get a blue for anything?" she asked vaguely.

Her conception of Oxford was limited.

"I wasn't bad at rowing at Eton. There's just a possibility of my getting a blue, if I do well in Fours next term."

"Oh, David, how thrilling! Do be good at Fours!" cried Emma, with sparkling eyes—she had not the remotest idea what he meant by "fours," and was too shy to reveal her ignorance by asking him.

"Or I might get a half-blue for jumping," continued David.

"High jumping? Oh, I was awfully good at

high jumping at school!" exclaimed Emma proudly. "I won a prize once for jumping four feet four when I was twelve!"

"That's jolly good for a girl!"

"How high can you jump?"

"Five feet six."

"Oh, David, how I should love to see you!"

He rolled over on to his face and, resting his chin on his hands, he watched her in silence; the graceful, supple lines of her body, the pretty curve from shoulder to waist, from hip to small well-modelled ankle.

"I love the feel of it!" said Emma suddenly, burying her hand in the silver sand and letting it trickle slowly through her fingers. "Isn't it warm?"

He stared at her down-bent head, her red, smiling lips, the strand of hair that had escaped from under her hat, and which was lying against her cheek, where the vivid colour deepened as she lifted her eyes to his.

"What are you thinking about, David?" she challenged him.

"I was thinking that I'd like to kiss you," replied David promptly.

Emma sat upright, staring in front of her with unseeing eyes, at the flat, sandy stretch of ground in the distance, the little peninsula with the

lighthouse on the end, erect and insignificant against the blue sky.

"David," she observed severely, "even your extreme youth doesn't excuse you for making remarks like that. It's—it's very impertinent of you. You only met me the day before yesterday for the first time."

"Oh, no, seven weeks ago at least! It's silly to pretend to be so shocked, because you know perfectly well you aren't a bit."

Emma took up a different line.

"Ah! You think that because I'm an actress you can treat me as you like—play with me—be rude to me and insult me just as you please. I see."

"Now you're being tragic! It's awfully becoming to you! But, of course, you know that!"

He waited a moment, and then, in a low wheedling voice, he added:

"Emma—if you are so much older than me, surely it can't matter my wanting to kiss you? It's like—it's like wanting to kiss my mother!"

"Thank you," remarked Emma sarcastically, but he saw from the curves of her averted face that she was smiling.

"Very well—if you promise never to speak like that again, I'll overlook it this once," she added with dignity.

"Didn't you like it then?"

"You're a horrid, precocious, conceited little boy!"

"You said you'd forgiven me?"

"You're incorrigible! What are you doing now?"

"Making a tunnel. Dig away your end and we'll meet in the middle."

"You might be four years old!"

"You aren't working half hard enough! Dig deeper!"

They tunnelled under the sand and soon their fingers met. She did not immediately draw her hand away, and they sat there looking innocent and unconcerned, with the soft, warm sand covering their clasped hands. Two sea-gulls flew over their heads, screaming, their white wings flapping against the blue sky. The sand was hot in the September sunshine, and the clasp of David's fingers was strong, vital, pulsating with youth and health.

"Oh, I am happy, I am happy!" she cried inwardly. Then her reason returned to her, cold and remorseless.

"What am I doing?" she thought, conscience-stricken, tugging at her imprisoned hand hidden in the sand. David released it, slowly, finger by finger, and Emma sighed.

"I suppose we must leave these darling, beautiful, peaceful sandhills. It must be getting late."

David glanced down at his watch, and she looked at him sitting there with downcast eyes; she noticed his thick, short, clustering lashes; the ring of little freckles under his eyes; the soft brown nape of his neck; and she felt a sudden sinking sensation within her, rather as if she were making a rapid descent in a lift. Her heart beat fast, and stooping impulsively, she pressed her lips passionately to the back of his head, where his hair started growing away from his neck, so softly and boyishly, forgetting everything but her burning desire to kiss it. David sat quite still, as if he had been turned into stone by her kiss. Then, as Emma scrambled to her feet, trembling and blushing, he too rose slowly, without looking at her. They walked home together, laughing and talking gaily, as if nothing had happened; by tacit agreement they steadily ignored that which had passed, and although Emma was grateful to him at first, she grew to find herself a little disappointed at heart, puzzled by his silence, the absence of his dramatic instinct; vexed at his lack of enterprise.

They arrived to find themselves half an hour late for lunch, but neither displayed the slightest sign of embarrassment; Emma gaily informed the seated table that David had made her walk to the lighthouse and back.

CHAPTER XIII

“WELL, did you have a good time?”

Emma had just arrived back and was sitting in the studio with the chow puppy on her lap, drawing off her gloves. Peggy poured her out a cup of tea and repeated the question eagerly.

“Oh, yes. It was great fun,” answered Emma vaguely.

“Who was there? What did you do?”

“Angela Lumley, Hughie Trevor, Cynthia Lovitt and her husband, and Hugo Sefton, and, of course, Sadie and Benjy. I think that’s all.” She sipped her tea pensively. “Oh, and Dick Cranford’s nephew was down there, David Seymour,” she added, as an afterthought.

“Oh, Emma! Did he say anything about Dick?”

“No, nothing.”

“He’s still at the ’Varsity, isn’t he?”

“Yes.”

“How dull! Boys of that age bore me to tears, don’t they you?”

Emma buried her face in Sung’s silky fur without answering.

"What did you do down there?" continued Peggy.

"Oh—I don't know—we played golf—and I bathed."

"Alone?"

"Yes."

"Why are you smiling to yourself?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"What else did you do?"

"I went for a long walk this morning to some sandhills. The sun was shining and the sea-gulls were shrieking, and it was all rather fascinating."

"It sounds rather dull," said Peggy, disappointedly. "What did you do on the sandhills?"

"I made a tunnel under the sand."

"A tunnel? Under the sand?" echoed Peggy, staring at her blankly. "All by yourself?"

"Yes."

"I don't believe you were alone," Peggy said suspiciously.

"All right. Don't then."

"Who was with you? Hugo Sefton?"

"If you like."

"Oh, Emma, don't be so irritating! Do tell me!"

Emma took off her hat, tossed it on the floor, leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes.

"One thing I will tell you: Hugo Sefton is going to give a season of Shakespeare this autumn and has offered me Rosalind in *As You Like It*, which is very convenient, because, as you know, there are reasons why I can't possibly continue with poor dear Martin at the Siddons."

"Oh, Emma! How clever of you! You'll make a wonderful Rosalind."

But Emma did not hear her. She was back on the sandhills in the warm sunshine, under a blue sky, and she could hear the sea-gulls shrieking, and the faint sound of the sea in the distance, and she seemed to smell the smell of homespun tweed, and leather, and tobacco, and again she looked into a brown, freckled face, very close to hers, and saw the crow's-foot of tiny creases at the corner of eyes that wrinkled up into narrow slits when they smiled.

"He smelled like a sweet, warm, sleepy puppy," she said to herself. "But how could I have kissed him? Immodest, inconsistent! Whatever could have induced me to behave like that?"

But she lingered on the recollection, until suddenly a new thought struck her. Why had he sat there so still, so cold, so unmoved? It was his opportunity—he should have jumped up and clasped her in his arms. . . . She caught her breath as she pictured herself in his arms, with his

face pressed close to hers. . . . Oh, David! . . . Was this the maternal instinct?

She shuddered and Peggy ran to her side.

"Emma, you're looking pale, and you're shivering! Have you caught a chill on those silly sandhills of yours?"

She smiled wearily.

"I expect I have—on those silly sandhills of mine!"

As she went slowly upstairs to lie down before going to the theatre, she experienced an overwhelming sense of boredom, of impatience at her life and her surroundings, a realization of the meaninglessness of everything and everybody. She found herself mechanically counting the stair-rod.

"It's that place," she said to herself drearily. "It's Smallborough that's done it. I'm bewitched."

Peggy found her lying on her bed, with large tears rushing out from under her closed lids, limp, exhausted, bereft of her amazing vitality, even of her sense of humour, and she stared at her with puzzled, apprehensive eyes.

"Oh, Emma darling, what's the matter?"

"I expect it's a chill," answered Emma, jerking her head impatiently under Peggy's curious gaze.

“ You want a nice hot bath to put you right ! ” said Peggy. “ I ’ ll go and turn it on for you. ”

As Emma lay in a steaming bath, redolent of verbenas, her depression fell from her and an impatient energy took its place.

“ My God ! I ’ ll work off the spell that place put on me ! I ’ m stronger than any old spell. I was mad—mad—down there. I didn ’ t know what I was doing. That boy ! he was very sweet—but I was bewitched by the place—the sea, and the marshes at the back. ” She soliloquized. “ Since when have I taken to flirting with school-boys ? It must have been the air ! ” Then, suddenly, a line from one of Vesta Tilley ’ s songs came into her head : “ Is it the air, there ? Oh no ! ” And she laughed aloud. Peggy was relieved at the sound, and when Emma came downstairs at seven for her early dinner, she was in the best of spirits, laughing and singing ; and all through dinner she amused herself by acting an impromptu dialogue between Benjy and her old dresser, Florrie, which she composed on the spur of the moment. Her imitation of Benjy was excellent, and Peggy concluded, between outbursts of laughter, that Emma must have recovered herself.

CHAPTER XIV

DURING the next week Emma fully expected, half hoping, half dreading, to hear from David. Every morning when her breakfast tray came in, she glanced quickly through her correspondence, with fingers that trembled with an eagerness that she was far from admitting; every evening at the theatre she expected him to walk into her dressing-room, but she received no word or sign. She told herself she was deeply relieved, resolutely put all thought of him out of her head, and turned her attention to better things.

The Knight in the Gallery terminated its run in another fortnight, and rehearsals started for *As You Like It*. Far from following Hugo Sefton's advice to the Shakespearean actor, Emma made no effort either to live, think, or dream Shakespeare. She lived a busy social, superficial, typically twentieth-century life; she attended all Cynthia Lovitt's parties; read Stephen McKenna for pleasure, Bernard Shaw for her luncheon-party conversation, and George Meredith to improve her mind; she dreamed of silly, inconsequent things which her thoughts never dwelt on during

the day . . . the sandhills . . . and that rather nice boy who was staying down there with them. . . . Secretly, she admitted to herself that Rosalind bored her. The rehearsals, too, were by no means the pleasant, amusing, easy things that they had been for *The Knight in the Gallery*. Her interpretation of Lizzie had needed scarcely any correction, any study; she had grasped it straight away. But Rosalind was another matter altogether. Hugo Sefton was painstaking, exacting, critical, a hard master, unsparing of himself and others. Emma found herself pulled up at every word, carefully coached in each intonation. Every gesture, every movement was taught her by Sefton, and soon the words grew to mean nothing at all to her. They became mere gibberish, her movements meaningless, she went through her part like a parrot.

After a lot of Press-notices and talk about the production, which attracted a good deal of attention, both from the old play-going world and the new, the First Night was an important and largely attended affair. Emma was hardly nervous, so mechanical had her part become, and so little did she count on her own personality and talent. She felt she was merely a vessel into which Hugo Sefton had poured all his own knowledge and experience. She was assured of

her success, and she sailed airily through her part with the confident carelessness of one who thinks the world is at her feet.

She had an excellent reception: the British Public is notoriously kind to old favourites, and since Emma had delighted them as Gordon Hereford's Lizzie, most of the audience hardly stopped to criticize her performance as Rosalind. To most of them it was good enough. "Shakespeare, you know," they explained to each other in apologetic tones, to account for any shortcomings on the part of the production or the actors, and they nodded their heads tolerantly.

At the end of the performance, among other bouquets was an enormous bunch of yellow roses sent to her anonymously, as usual, and one still larger of pink carnations, with Dick Cranford's card attached. "May we come round, if you are not too tired?" was scribbled in pencil at the top. "We"? thought Emma, "Who is with him?" She sent a message to say that she would be delighted, and at the end of the performance, surrounded by flowers, Emma received Dick in her dressing-room.

"I've brought David along, too; I thought you wouldn't mind," said Dick shyly, and Emma gave a swift look past him, and looked into narrow, smiling, mocking eyes.

"I'm delighted to see you both," she said rather formally. "And now I've got an opportunity to thank you for sending me those lovely flowers, Dick!"

David shot a quick, contemptuous look at the bouquet of pink carnations, and then glanced at the tall, fragrant roses beside them. Something about the curious half-mocking, half-triumphant smile hovering round his slanting eyes gave Emma the information she had long sought.

"So you are the mysterious donor of the yellow roses!" she addressed him inwardly. "I have always wondered—now I know! You gave yourself away by your eyes!"

She turned to Dick.

"What did you think of it, Dick?"

"I thought you were wonderful," he said in a low voice.

"You like me better as Rosalind than as Lizzie?" said Emma quickly.

"Yes!"

"No!"

The two exclamations came sharply together, and Emma looked from one to another, and burst out laughing.

"You were shocked by poor little Lizzie, Dick, weren't you? Own up!" she said teasingly.

He looked away from her twinkling eyes.

"I thought—I didn't like the play," he replied.

"You were shocked," said Emma.

"I thought it was a wonderful play!" broke in David unexpectedly. "Lizzie was a splendid character. You were marvellous, but then, except for the cockney accent, that girl Lizzie simply was you!"

Dick swung round and stared at him as if he doubted his sanity.

"My dear boy! there's no resemblance whatever! It's an insult to say such a thing!" he exclaimed, pale with indignation. "You must have been joking?"

David sought Emma's eye, but she looked away, purposely. He shrugged his shoulders and relapsed into sulky silence. Emma stole a glance at him: he looked very young beside Dick, slim, boyish, immature; and—was it Emma's imagination?—or did Dick look older to-night? The sagging cheek-line, the deep crow's-foot, the sad, tired look in his eyes. Emma felt suddenly sorry for him. Her voice held a deep note of pity when she bade him good-night. He mistook it for tenderness.

"May I come to tea to-morrow?" he asked, in a low voice, and as Emma nodded her heart beat faster.

She held out her hand to David.

"Good-night, David," she said carelessly, without even troubling to look at him.

"Good-night," he muttered, and she saw that his eyes were sparkling with anger, and she watched a dull, red flush creeping up into his brown cheek.

"When are you going back to Oxford?" she added with good-natured condescension.

Dick laid his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"He goes back to-morrow," he said. "He's been at Cranford with me for a fortnight, but I wish it could have been longer."

A flame of anger burnt up inside her at the thought of both of them down there, at Cranford, each thinking of her, in secret, but neither of them having the energy, the initiative, to write to her.

"Because I'm an actress," she said to herself, bitterly, but outwardly she smiled.

"So your holidays are over to-morrow?" she said to David, in the condescending, smiling manner which so many grown-up people adopt when they are speaking to a child.

David turned away impatiently.

"Good-night," he called out, in a voice choked with rage.

As he and Dick went out of the dressing-room

they bumped into Gordon Hereford on his way to congratulate Emma. Emma ran to meet him eagerly.

"What did you think of it?" she asked.

"You looked perfectly charming," he said slowly, and Emma wondered why he chose only to comment on her personal appearance, and why he did not praise her acting.

"Do you know," she whispered in a sudden outburst of confidence, "I wish I were back in *The Knight in the Gallery*! Lizzie comes easier to me than Rosalind. 'Gordon Hereford' seems more my line than William Shakespeare."

He laughed rather absent-mindedly.

"Emma—may I drop in to tea to-morrow?"

She hesitated.

"I'm engaged—at tea-time," she ventured, after a pause.

He glanced at her sharply.

"Engaged to be married?" he asked, quickly.

"Oh no! What an extraordinary idea!" exclaimed Emma, but he noticed that she looked rather confused.

"Is it an extraordinary idea? I never knew it was. . . . Emma—I want to see you most particularly to-morrow—any time you like——"

"Very well—come to lunch. I can't promise

to give you caviare or oysters, but my cook isn't bad, and if you don't mind a——"

"Providing you don't give me blancmange, I don't mind anything," he interrupted gravely.

"I swear not to have blancmange," she said, laughing, as she bade him good-night.

CHAPTER XV

WHEN he arrived at the little flat in King's Road on the following day, he found Emma alone by the fire in the small sitting-room, which was filled with autumn leaves and brown chrysanthemums. She leaped to her feet with a cry of pleasure. He noticed she held *The Times* in one hand, and after greeting him, she glanced down at it in dismay.

"Oh! Have you seen my notices?" she cried. "Aren't they unkind? I knew that I wasn't a good Rosalind, but I must say I think it was a little unchivalrous of that old Blankley to be funny at my expense in *The Times*. He says I should make such a good Principal Boy in the Xmas Pantomime at Drury Lane! All the more unkind because I have a sneaking conviction in my heart that I should make a huge success as Aladdin, or the Prince in Cinderella!"

She laughed ruefully, and glanced up at him for consolation. He made no comment, so she went on:

"The *Morning Post* was no kinder. Listen to this: 'Miss Emma Durville made a charming

Rosalind, but we could not help feeling that after every speech she was waiting for a chorus to march in from the wings to support her in a song and dance! What could be more crushing? What do you think about it?"

He smiled and shook his head.

"When you get to my age, you will cease to pay any attention to the Press. As to my private opinion, mayn't I have lunch first, before I give it?"

"Did you think me so very bad, then?" asked Emma.

"I'm so hungry!" he said plaintively. "Mayn't I have lunch before we discuss these trifles? Food, after all, is the only thing that really matters in life."

Emma laughed and led the way into the dining-room. She was a charming hostess, smiling, gracious, reposeful; she did not follow each dish round the table with anxious eye, nor press him to a second helping when he did not want one; she encouraged him to do all the talking; laughed at his witty remarks; and repeated his *bons mots* after him, softly, to herself, as if she were storing them up in her mind as treasures. After lunch she settled herself down beside the fire, and he watched the flickering lights on her face, and on her pretty, loosely clasped hands, lying in her lap.

"You're a firelight woman, Emma."

"Am I? I know I'm not a daylight woman! The sunshine shows up the lines round my mouth, when I smile. I laugh too often, and when I'm thirty I shall be a wrinkled old hag!"

He laughed and then fell into silent contemplation of her firelit profile. It was dark outside, and pouring with rain, and as he was sitting with his back to the window, Emma could only see his face whenever the firelight caught it, now and then, in flickering shadows.

"Emma—what are you going to do with yourself?" he asked abruptly.

"Do with myself?" echoed Emma, startled.

"What are you going to do with your life?"

"Why—act, of course!" exclaimed Emma, staring at him.

He gazed at her sadly.

"Emma," he said gently, after a pause, "you asked me just now what I thought of your performance last night. Well, I will be candid, because I am your friend—I thought it was deplorable."

"Oh!" gasped Emma. "You are indeed candid!" she added, forcing a laugh.

He paid no heed to her discomfiture, but continued with gentle brutality:

"You aren't a great actress, Emma. You aren't even suited to the stage. You think you are now, with the glamour of the footlights still blinding your eyes, but just cast a glance into the future: think of yourself in ten years' time, just beginning to know your job, still young, but just not young enough for *ingénue* parts—you who are so typically the *ingénue*—cast for the villainess, for the neglected wife parts! Think of it!" He paused dramatically; then: "In ten years' time you'll have a double chin, Emma!"

"Oh! Oh!" cried Emma, half-laughing, half-crying. "Tell me I'm not an Ellen Terry or a Sarah Bernhardt, if you like—though I assure you I know it only too well! But don't—don't tell me I've got a double chin!"

"I said in ten years' time, my dear!"

"What base ingratitude after the success I made of your Lizzie!" she cried, laughingly, but her eyes were blazing with resentment.

"My dear child—you are a born mimic and except for the cockney accent, which you certainly got to perfection, there was no acting about it! Listen, Emma!" He leaned forward eagerly, his pale, handsome face tense with excitement: "In some extraordinary, supernatural way I visualized you before I had ever seen you! The

Lizzie I saw was your very self, your voice, your face, your figure, your personality—and when you walked into the Lumleys' drawing-room that night, my heart nearly stopped beating, for here in the living, breathing flesh, was the creation of my brain! Emma, I want you to marry me."

Emma sprang to her feet with a startled cry.

"Either you or I must have gone mad!" she exclaimed.

He drew her into her chair again, with gentle, soothing hands.

"Speaking for myself, I am quite sane," he said quietly. "I will repeat my question. Emma, will you marry me?"

"But—but you've just told me I'm a rotten actress with a double chin!" protested Emma irrelevantly.

"Is that any reason why you shouldn't make a charming wife? Is it a 'cause or just impediment'?"

Emma laid her hands on his shoulders, and gazed searchingly into his grave, brown eyes.

"I'll tell you the 'just impediment,' Gordon. You don't love me."

"My dear, I admire you; you're understanding; I can talk to you as I can to no other woman in the world."

Emma shook her head.

"It won't do! You don't adore me, do you?"

He smiled at her naïveté.

"If it comes to that, do you—adore—me?"

Emma closed her eyes in an ecstasy of longing.

"I want to be adored!" she whispered.

"Emma, do you consider adoration would be a good foundation to connubial happiness? Believe me, mutual understanding is far safer and happier in the end."

"I shall wait till I find someone to adore me," said Emma obstinately. "I don't want to be understood!"

"You'll miss your market, Emma," he warned her gravely.

"Why should I give up my career and marry the first man who comes along?"

"Am I the first? You flatter me!"

"Why should I marry?"

"No woman of your temperament is ultimately happy without children."

Emma dropped her eyes. A wave of indignation swept through her veins. He was regarding her as he would a cow: a healthy animal to breed from; a vessel through which his sons might come to enrich the world.

"Ah!" she murmured ironically, "you share

Napoleon's views on woman. It's all you think we're fit for, having your children! You think you're conferring an unprecedented honour on me, I suppose?"

"It's hardly an insult, is it?" he asked quietly.

"You've got the smug look of the public benefactor, Gordon!"

"I never knew you had such a bad temper!" he observed.

"If you married me you'd soon discover I was a better actress than you thought, and a far worse woman!"

He took her hands in his and smiled into her eyes.

"Don't be angry. It doesn't become you. Remember, you aren't the flashing brunette type! Women with fair hair and heavy-lidded blue eyes should endeavour always to look appealing and tender and reposeful."

She laughed suddenly, on her low, clear, thrush's note.

"It's no use, dear!" she said. "You're too clever for me. I couldn't stand a clever husband! When I marry again—if ever—I shall choose a simple, foolish man who will worship the very ground I walk on. And believe me, dear," she added earnestly, "you would be much happier

with some gentle, uncritical, adoring little girl who would be contented to look on and admire. I could never do that, and in your heart you know it. We're both egoists, and it would never do. That's my final word, Gordon."

He kissed both her hands gently.

"Good-bye, Emma."

She caught hold of his coat.

"Oh, it won't make any difference to our friendship, will it, Gordon?" she cried. "I can't do without you as a friend."

"Of course it won't make any difference," he said, but his voice was cold, and as he walked out of the room, his eyes were dark and grave with wounded vanity.

When Peggy came in a few minutes later, she found Emma sitting in the dusk beside a fire that was nearly out. She ran to her and knelt down by her side.

"Emma—darling—I've got something to tell you," she exclaimed, and Emma started from a reverie.

"I'm engaged!" announced Peggy, in proud, glad tones.

"Engaged? Who to?" demanded Emma ungrammatically, sitting bolt upright in her chair.

"To Jimmie Patterson—you remember him

at the 'College of Histrionic Art'? He's so nice, and so clever, and oh, Emma! I swear he hasn't got a squint."

Emma laughed hysterically.

"Oh, my dear! Don't remind me of my unkind remarks now. I hope he is good enough for you, Peggy?"

"Good enough? For me? Oh, Emma!"

Emma sighed wistfully.

"You are in love with him," she observed rather bitterly.

"Oh yes. And so he is with me. That's the wonderful part of it, Emma."

Emma yawned. Involuntarily there rose to her mind a picture of the Patterson ménage. "How dull they'll be!" she said to herself.

"Emma—he's coming to tea," murmured Peggy ecstatically.

"To-day?" exclaimed Emma, in dismay.

"Yes. You will be nice to him, Emma, for my sake, won't you?" pleaded Peggy, and Emma kissed her glowing cheek tenderly.

"I will," she promised, with a stifled sigh.

Dick Cranford and Jimmie Patterson arrived at the same moment and scowled at each other ferociously as they were announced, for each had hoped to be the only guest. Emma greeted Patterson warmly, and Dick looked more morose

than ever; directly it dawned on him that the latter was engaged to Peggy, however, his whole bearing changed. The frown left his face; he beamed on the young couple, laughed and jested with them; never had Emma seen him appear to greater advantage.

“Now I know you blushing young things want to be alone, so why don’t you sit in the dining-room? ‘There’s a fire in there,’” suggested Emma, at the end of tea.

Patterson and Peggy looked sheepishly at one another and rather awkwardly left the room. Dick’s cheerful manner immediately fell from him; he became grave, restless, nervous, fidgeted about in his chair, drummed with his fingers on his knees, and walked aimlessly about the room, talking at random, spasmodically, for the sake of talking. As his volubility increased so did Emma’s silence; his nervousness reacted on her and made her feel like bursting into hysterical laughter. In desperation she gave him some photographs that had recently been taken of her, and he looked at each one in turn.

“Would you like one?” she asked, smiling at his air of concentration.

“Yes,” he answered in a low voice, “I should. Thank you.”

Emma walked over to where he was standing,

critically examining them in the light, and looked over his shoulder. She could smell his hair-wash and the distinctive smell of the cigarettes he always smoked; and she could see the outline of his strong, handsome profile, his firm, bronzed cheek-bone, and his reddish-gold moustache. He turned abruptly and seized her shoulders roughly. The grip of his strong hands made her wince. She lifted her eyes to his, but the expression she saw there overwhelmed her; she closed her eyes to shut it out, just as he clasped her in his arms.

“My darling, my darling!” he murmured, burying his face in her hair, “I adore you. Will you marry me?”

“That is the second time to-day?” Emma said to herself. “They say there’s always a third—who will the next be?”

“I know I’m old, but oh, Emma, I will try and make you happy.”

“You’re not old,” said Emma perfunctorily.

“Twenty years older than you!” he moaned. “Can you look at me, Emma? Can you think of an old fool like myself?”

His humility touched her, but it sickened her at the same time. She went very pale.

“Don’t say that, Dick!” she said breathlessly. “It isn’t true.”

His arms grew tighter round her.

"Do you love me? Darling, please, please——"

Inside her brain something was hammering: "How lucky he is, how lucky to feel like that! I shall never know it, never, never."

"Will you marry me, Emma?"

"Yes, Dick. I will."

Her voice seemed to her ridiculously loud and clear, and yet it seemed to belong to someone else.

"But not yet," she went on hurriedly. "Not at once. At the end of the run of the show we'll announce our engagement, but till then it must be a secret."

"Yes, darling, anything you like," he acquiesced, and she thought he seemed relieved. "I—I think I ought to explain to you that my mother may be rather difficult," he stammered. "You see—she's been brought up in a world where actresses—and the stage, you know, are considered——er——"

"I know," nodded Emma.

"She's never realized that anything has changed since her girlhood. I'm her only child now—my brothers and sisters all died very young—so I mean a lot to her. She—she's a wonderful old lady," he added. "She'll simply love you

when she sees you, of course, but it's just the—the——"

"Breaking the news?" suggested Emma, helpfully.

"Exactly. The idea, you know. She expresses herself very forcibly. She's got a very strong personality. You and she will get on awfully well when you know each other of course——"

"Shall we?" murmured Emma doubtfully.

"It's just at first——" He paused. "I think she won't mind so much if I tell her you've been acting Shakespeare, perhaps," he continued.

"Need we tell her I've ever been on the stage?" suggested Emma.

He chuckled.

"Not tell her? Good Heavens! There's no hoodwinking my mother. Why, she's got the sharpest eyes and the quickest ears in all England!"

"What an old terror!" thought Emma; "but perhaps I shall be able to wheedle her round."

"You'll be able to manage her, darling," said Dick as if he had read her thoughts. "No one could resist you for long."

Emma sighed contentedly and nestled up to him.

"Oh, darling! How I'm longing to show you Cranford," exclaimed Dick. "You'll love it."

"I'm sure I shall."

"You do like the country, don't you, darling?"

"Oh yes, Dick. Shall we hunt?"

"Can you ride, darling?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Emma complacently, a smile of satisfaction on her lips.

"Good! I was so afraid perhaps you couldn't—although you'd have soon learnt. Yes, we'll hunt all the winter——"

"And come up to London for the season."

"Er—what?"

"Come up to London for the season," repeated Emma, not as if she were asking a question, but merely stating a fact.

"Oh—if you like, darling."

"Where shall we take a house for the season?"

"Oh, I don't care—anywhere my darling likes, except Cromwell Road."

"As if I should ever choose Cromwell Road!" said Emma indignantly.

"Do you know, Emma, I've got a confession to make," said Dick. "I went away to try and forget you!"

"Yes, I knew it," said Emma calmly.

"I never wrote to you, although I simply longed to often. I tried to put you out of my thoughts altogether. I thought that you weren't the right woman for me—I felt I should never be able to make you happy—and I thought perhaps you wouldn't make me happy. But oh—Emma! —I know now that only you, and you alone, can make me happy. I shall never know what happiness means away from you again!"

He kissed her passionately, and Emma's eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Dick, Dick! I think I ought to tell you—I don't love you like that! I don't know what it means to care for anybody as you care for me. I'm not worth it, Dick! It frightens me!"

"Don't be frightened, my little darling!" he said tenderly. "You couldn't possibly care for me as I care for you. Nobody could."

"Now, Dick, you must go," said Emma, gently pushing him towards the door. "Please go, now, dear Dick. I want to—think things over——"

"You don't regret your decision?" he exclaimed, a look of tragic apprehension crossing his face.

"No, no, you silly old darling!" laughed Emma.

The look of misery vanished from his eyes.

“Thank God ! Oh, my darling, you gave me such a fright ! I think I should die if you told me you didn’t love me after all. Good-bye, my love; I’ll come and fetch you from the theatre to-night.”

He kissed her rapturously, called to Wong, who was extremely bored with these amorous proceedings, and a second later Emma heard the door bang. She sank down on a chair, wondering why she felt so tired. “Lady Cranford—the Countess of Cranford !” she murmured to herself, pressing her throbbing temples against the cold marble mantelpiece.

A ring at the front door made her leap to her feet as if she had been shot.

“My nerves are getting awful !” she said to herself. “I must take a tonic.”

The door opened.

“Mr. Seymour,” announced the little parlour-maid, her eyes shining with admiration for Emma, whom she now respected eternally for owning three such personable “young men” and successfully arranging a tête-à-tête with each of them in a single day.

Emma stood in the middle of the room as if she were paralyzed, her eyes fixed on the door, and her hands clasped tightly over her bosom to still

the beating of her heart. She recovered herself with an effort, as David advanced towards her with an outstretched hand.

"A late call," she said lightly, glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece.

"I'm sorry to be so late," said David in a curiously breathless manner. "I thought I'd come and say good-bye to you before going back to Oxford to-night."

"What a pity you're so late!" answered Emma nervously. "I've got to go and dress for my early dinner."

"My train goes in half an hour, so I shan't keep you a minute," he put in quickly.

Emma noticed he was pale and dishevelled, and that he was twiddling his fingers nervously.

"I wish he'd go away; oh, how I wish he'd never come!" she kept saying to herself.

David was looking round the room. His eye fell on the scattered photographs.

"My new photographs from Rita Martin," said Emma, snatching eagerly at a subject of conversation. "Would you like one to take back to Oxford with you?"

She nearly laughed aloud at her lack of originality, and she wondered idly if he would answer in the very same words as Dick. But David never even glanced at the photographs.

"No," he said bluntly; "a photograph of you would be like looking at a pot of heather, and pretending one was on a grouse moor in Scotland!"

"Thank you," said Emma with a forced laugh and a sarcastic little bow. "Don't let me force you to take one. They were very expensive."

"May I smoke?" asked David.

"Of course."

He lit a cigarette and stood before the fire, looking down at her with narrowed, sombre, moody eyes.

"You remind me of a panther," said Emma. "The one at the Zoo, called Bogey."

"Do I?"

He stared at her till she looked away.

"Why didn't you drop in earlier?" she asked, for the sake of saying something.

"I didn't want to spoil a tête-à-tête," he drawled sleepily.

"What do you mean?" asked Emma, her colour rising.

"I don't butt in where I'm not wanted. You don't suppose I didn't realize that you and Dick wished to be alone, do you?"

"How did you know it was Dick?" asked Emma, with flashing eyes.

"I followed him here. I've been waiting outside in the rain. It was damned cold!"

His teeth suddenly chattered, and Emma saw that his lips were blue.

"You followed him here? Are you in the habit of dogging his footsteps, may I ask?"

"Poor old Dick!"

"What d'you mean?"

"He's in love with you, isn't he?"

He was swaying slightly, and Emma's eyes flashed scornfully.

"You're drunk!" she cried in disgust. "How dare you come to my house in such a condition?"

"I'm perfectly sober," returned David quietly.

"Then your impertinence is intolerable!"

He paid no attention to her anger.

"Are you in love with Dick?" he asked. "He's very nearly an old man."

"You forget yourself, David. I think you must have gone mad. You'd better go home."

"In four years' time Dick will be fifty," continued the soft, relentless, croaky murmur. "Fifty is awfully old, Emma!"

A cold, numb feeling crept round Emma's heart. She longed to utter all sorts of angry words, but she felt too sick and faint. David took a step nearer.

"You couldn't marry an old man, Emma!"

She flung back her head and faced him angrily.

"Dick asked me to marry him a few minutes ago and I accepted him," she said.

"You'll be miserable. He won't understand you. He'll bore you stiff. Why are you doing it, Emma?"

"I wonder how you dare speak to me like this!" exclaimed Emma, trying to keep her voice steady. She moved towards the bell and pressed it violently. "I've rung for the maid to show you out."

He threw his cigarette-end into the fire and stood with his elbow on the mantelpiece, graceful, indolent, smiling, as the parlourmaid opened the door.

"Did you ring, M'm?"

"Yes, the door, Hopkins," said Emma coldly. She held out her hand. "Good-bye."

David flashed her one of his sweetest smiles.

"I wonder if I could have a taxi?" he asked pleasantly. "It's raining, you see, and I've got to catch a train."

Emma could scarcely conceal her annoyance.

"Will you please telephone for a taxi, Hopkins?"

The parlourmaid left the room, furtively

glancing from one to the other, with shrewd, inquisitive eyes, and David turned slowly to Emma and faced her.

“Why were you so offensive to me last night?” he asked quietly; then, as she made no reply, he answered the question himself. “You’re afraid of me, Emma.”

“Afraid?” echoed Emma scornfully.

He moved closer to her and held her eyes in a piercing gaze, as if he were hypnotizing her.

“You’re not in love with Dick,” he said slowly. “You’re in love with me.”

Something snapped in Emma’s head. She broke into peal after peal of hysterical laughter. It seemed to her that she would never stop laughing.

“My dear boy!” she gasped out at last. “You must be mad! I feel towards you exactly as if I were your mother!”

“Do you? Do you?”

Suddenly he flung his arms round her, pressing his body against hers, and she felt his soft tousled hair against her forehead, his lips raining kisses on her face. She closed her eyes; her head swam and her knees gave way beneath her. She clung to him, surrendered herself to him utterly. She felt she had been starving for this; she found herself fighting, sobbing for breath; her heart

seemed to be swelling, breaking with an immense, over-flooding tenderness: it seemed to leap out of her bosom, and fly to him; she felt she was dying in his arms. . . .

“Now do you feel like my mother?” cried David passionately, but Emma made no reply: she was lying against his shoulder in a dead faint.

CHAPTER XVI

It was the eve of Emma's wedding-day, a cold, blustering night in January, and she and Peggy were sitting over the fire in Emma's bedroom, in their dressing-gowns, brushing their hair, and sorting out a packet of papers, bills, advertisements, and letters in Emma's writing-case, and throwing most of them in the fire.

"How I shall miss you!" sighed Peggy for quite the hundredth time that week.

Emma made no reply; she was reading a pencilled note, with a pucker between her brows. She tore it up and threw it in the fire. As it burned brightly Peggy caught the printed address at the top: "Old College, Oxford," and was reminded of an incident in Emma's life which had always puzzled her.

"Emma," she hazarded, "d'you remember the night you fainted?"

"Yes, why?"

"Why did you tell me not to speak of it to Dick? And why did you say I wasn't to say anything about David Seymour's visit?"

"How did you know it was David Seymour?" asked Emma sharply.

Peggy hung her head.

"Hopkins told me. And Emma, I couldn't help noticing you had letters from Oxford, and I knew he was the only boy you knew up at the 'Varsity, so you see——"

"Well?"

"Why are you so funny about him? Why didn't you speak about him afterwards? You were so—so mysterious about it! Oh, Emma, he was so worried about you. He came tearing along the passage and burst into the dining-room, shouting for help. He was terrified. He thought you were dead. He said it was all his fault, and he wouldn't leave the house till you had come to."

Emma moved impatiently.

"He's rather fascinating-looking, Emma—those funny eyes of his . . ."

She glanced at Emma's grim profile.

"Why do you hate him so?" she asked.
"Why did you always refuse to see him whenever he called—why d'you dislike talking about him? What has the poor boy done?"

"He was—if you really must know, Peggy, he fancied himself enamoured of me, and behaved very absurdly; he made ardent love to me that evening, and it worried me terribly; that's why I fainted. . . ."

"But he's only nineteen, isn't he?" cried Peggy, open-mouthed.

"That's all. Now perhaps you see why I had to be so firm. I didn't want Dick to hear about it—it would have upset him very much."

"Of course," murmured Peggy in shocked tones. "Poor Emma! But I suppose he couldn't help falling in love with you, poor boy. He was awfully anxious about you that night. He looked so young, somehow, like a little boy! His face was pale, and his hair was all tousled and untidy—I felt as if I wanted to kiss him and tell him to be happy again!"

"Need we go on talking about him?" asked Emma in a hard, muffled voice, and something in her tone prompted Peggy to lean forward and lay her hand on her knee.

"Dear Emma—you are happy, aren't you?" she asked wistfully, staring at Emma's averted face. "You ought to be, because to-morrow——"

"Oh, to-morrow!" said Emma, staring into the fire.

"Darling Emma—you are sure of yourself, aren't you?"

Emma gave a short, contemptuous laugh.

"Oh, I'm sure of myself, all right!" she replied, in a hard voice.

"You once said you thought Dick was too old for you," ventured Peggy. "But you don't think so now, do you? He is desperately in love with you, Emma. I hope—I hope——"

She did not finish her sentence, but looked at Emma anxiously.

"I'm a lucky little devil, Peggy dear," laughed Emma. "Every débutante's mother in London will be green with envy as I sail down the aisle to-morrow!"

"Dick is lucky, too," put in Peggy.

"His mother wouldn't agree with you."

"What was she like when Dick took you down to see her?"

"Oh, she eyed me contemptuously from head to foot, and then snorted!"

"You will win her round," said Peggy with conviction.

"She may forgive me if I have a son!"

Peggy was silent for a minute, then, suddenly:

"Will you like having babies, Emma?"

"I should love to have a son," said Emma dreamily, and inwardly she added, "A son like David!"

"I should like to have lots of babies."

"Don't worry—you and Jimmie are certain to have dozens! People who can't afford it always do!"

She kissed Peggy an affectionate good-night. Peggy clung to her.

"I do hope you will be happy, darling," she whispered with her eyes full of tears.

Emma accompanied her to her bedroom door, and then returned to the fire; she sat gazing into the glowing embers as they sank lower and lower, until she found herself shivering in the cold. She thrust her hand into the lace yoke of her nightdress and drew out a crumpled letter. She smoothed it out and read it through slowly:

"DARLING HEART,

"When I held you in my arms to-night, I knew that you belonged to me, body and soul, and I felt that you knew it too. I realized a long time ago, when first I saw you acting in *The Knight in the Gallery*, that there could never be anyone like you in my life again. I love you better than anyone else in the world, and I think you know I do, although you pretend you don't. My darling, my darling, my darling. When I shut my eyes I can feel you in my arms.

"God bless you.

"DAVID."

She tore it up carefully into little shreds, and buried them deep among the glowing coals. A little fitful blaze sprang up, and then died away.

The wind whistled round the house and moaned in the chimney. Emma shivered.

“Well, that’s over!” she said aloud. “I’m not the kind of woman to mess up my life for the sake of a passing infatuation for a boy five years younger than myself. I know myself too well for that!”

She smiled scornfully, as she remembered another subsequent letter of David’s, in which he urged her to wait a year for him to come of age, when he would come into a thousand a year, on which he proposed to marry her! But, as she laid her head on the pillow, the smile faded on her lips; she began to weep, and she was so tired that she cried herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XVII

EMMA was married at St. Margaret's, Westminster. She thoroughly enjoyed her wedding. Her father and she drove through the streets in a bridal car, flying white streamers, and Mr. Durville, in a new morning suit, with a white gardenia in his buttonhole, was in a loquacious mood.

"Well, my dear, I congratulate you," he said. "You have surpassed all my expectations. You're a lot cleverer than I thought you were. For the first time in my life I can sincerely say I admire one of my offspring! As Tennyson justly observes, 'Kind hearts are more than coronets, and simple faith than Norman blood,' but you, Emma, have had the good fortune to secure a combination of all these fair virtues! Burke's Peerage leaves us in no doubt about his coronet and his Norman blood, whilst his genial manner bears testimony to his kind heart, and his simple faith in you is almost more than I can bear to see without bursting into tears!" He glanced at his watch. "In less than half an hour you will be the Countess of Cranford." He wagged his forefinger at her solemnly. "Mark my words, Emma, we can get anything we want if we are

willing to pay the price. Your price will be hours and hours of boredom, but I think on the whole you have secured a bargain !”

Emma laughed softly to herself as she fastened the last button of her long suede gloves and cast a quick look in the narrow mirror opposite. She was dressed in palest grey from head to foot, nestling into a huge chinchilla wrap which Dick had given her; her large-brimmed hat had soft ostrich feathers drooping down one side; round her throat were the Cranford pearls, and she carried an enormous sheaf of pink roses.

“I wish I could have worn white,” she said in tones of disappointment.

“A white tulle veil is very unbecoming,” answered her father. “I assure you, you look far better as you are.”

Outside the church there was a large crowd, and Emma’s heart swelled with delight. As she stepped out of the car she heard an appreciative murmur from the crowd, and she knew she looked beautiful. She heard Dick draw a quick breath when she approached the altar. He took up his stand beside her, and fumbled for her hand. She handed her bouquet to her father, who stood clasping it to his bosom in a mock-graceful manner, until Mrs. Durville took it away from him, frowning severely.

The Bishop, who was a cousin of Dick's, started reading out the marriage service in a loud sing-song voice, and Emma's mind rushed back to the day when she had uttered these same vows, and she thought tenderly and regretfully of Nibs, gay, beautiful, thoughtless Nibs, who had mumbled the words inaccurately after Mr. Whitely, in the little village church at Crowbridge, whose strong, healthy, beautiful body was lying in the dust and whose soul had passed beyond. . . .

Dick made his responses audibly.

"I, Richard Archibald, take thee, Emma Mary . . ."

"Archibald?" thought Emma. "What a joke! He never told me his name was Archibald! I always thought the 'A' stood for Arthur. I shall rag him!"

Now it was her turn:

"I, Emma Mary, take thee——" She paused, and the Bishop prompted her in a low voice. "Archibald, certainly not!" she was longing to add, and she nearly laughed out loud. Never had she felt so flippant.

"Those whom God hath joined let no man put asunder!" thundered the Bishop, glaring fiercely into the congregation and hoping they would realize how ardently he disapproved of divorce.

Emma's heart sank within her. It all seemed so final, so irrevocable. She and Dick were man and wife, and already he was gripping her hand possessively, already he was assuming the protective manner of the husband who has just promised to "cherish" the weak woman, who, in her turn, has sworn to honour and obey him. In the vestry Emma signed her name, feeling as if she were in a dream. Old Lady Cranford shook her coldly by the hand; then she turned to Dick. "My darling boy!" she cried, in the low, muffled tones of those who deem it unseemly to display any emotion in public; but Emma caught the note of protecting pity and, watching her narrowly, saw the cold, beaky profile distorted, the withered cheeks parchment-coloured, the stern, self-willed mouth trembling and hideous with emotion. The moment passed, and the Dowager Countess of Cranford swept out of the vestry, looking like a haughty, rather bad-tempered old parrot.

A pretty, dark, middle-aged woman approached Emma shyly.

"Dick hasn't introduced us yet, but I'm Agatha Seymour," she said, and Emma stooped impulsively and kissed her.

She had not needed any introduction; she knew directly, by the resemblance of those dark, almond-shaped eyes, that it was David's mother.

She heard her explaining to Dick that David had been so sorry not to be able to attend the wedding, but that he had been forced to leave that very day for Switzerland, with a party of Oxford men who were all going out there for the winter sports.

The organ burst out into Mendelssohn's Wedding March, and Emma took her husband's arm, and together they walked down the aisle. She recognized her theatrical acquaintances, incongruously mingled with friends of her father's in the medical profession, and all the inhabitants of Crowbridge. Mr. and Mrs. Whitely were seated next to Martin Lawrence and his wife; and Mrs. Dick, the village doctor's wife, in her dowdy little blue silk frock, with her shiny red button-nose, was sandwiched between Sir Hugo and Lady Sefton—the latter wrapped in sable and rouged up to the eyes—and Gordon Hereford. The ludicrous contrast tickled her sense of the ridiculous, and she could not help laughing. The Press photographers pushed forward and snapped her eagerly.

"There goes the 'appy bride!" called out an old woman in the crowd. "Gawd bless you, dearie!"

The cinematograph operator took Emma waving to the beery old hag as she stepped into the car and drove away.

Somewhat to the indignation of her enemies Cynthia Lovitt had swiftly established her claim to the young couple by lending her house for the reception, and Emma stood for an hour in her famous black drawing-room, magnificently decorated with white lilies, kissing and shaking hands with a never-ending stream of people.

"Oh, Emma! Just fancy! Now you are a real live Countess!" cried Doris, in shrill, piercing tones that echoed through the crowded room, as she kissed her blushing sister.

"Good for you, Emma!" grunted Oswald, her small brother, rather flushed after a surreptitious glass or two of champagne, bursting out of an Eton suit he had long outgrown, with a dilapidated-looking pink carnation in his button-hole. "Doris and I always said you'd do jolly well for yourself in the end!"

Emma looked round her furtively, wondering how many guests had heard her family's coarse and tactless comments.

"I might be an adventuress from the way my relations go on!" she said to herself indignantly.

The best man came to her rescue.

"They are waiting for you to cut the cake, Lady Cranford," he said, and Emma followed him with alacrity.

She and Dick drove away at about half past four,

amid an outcry of farewells and shouts of "Good luck!"

Dick leaned back and heaved a sigh of relief.

"Well, thank God that's over!" he said.

"Did you hate it? Poor Dick! what a shame!"

He opened a handful of telegrams, one after another, and threw them disconsolately on the floor of the car.

"I must say I did expect a letter or a wire from David," he said. "I can't help thinking it was rather funny of him to choose to-day, of all days, to start on his trip to Switzerland. I asked him to be my best man, too, but he refused, on the plea that he would be in Switzerland. He might have postponed his visit for a day or two, I think!"

"Oh, well, I suppose he couldn't bear to waste a moment of his holiday," said Emma. "After all—he's very young. . . ."

She slipped her hand into his, and his face lit up immediately.

"My generous little girl!" he said tenderly. "You'd find excuses for everyone." He lifted her hand to his lips. "I adore you!"

* * * *

That night, as she lay in his arms, she seemed to hear a sudden cry in the night:

"Emma! Emma!"

The voice was David's. Dick felt her body stiffen and recoil, and as he gently kissed her neck he told himself that he loved her all the more for her purity, her chastity, her beautiful reserve. Long after Dick had fallen into a peaceful slumber beside her, Emma lay wakeful, rigid, staring at the flickering shadows of the firelight on the ceiling; her father's words kept running in her head: "You can get anything you want if you are willing to pay the price." She fell asleep towards dawn, and when Dick woke in the morning, she was sleeping beside him with a childish smile on her parted lips. She was dreaming of the sandhills.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT was a beautiful September morning, warm and sunny, a blue sky above and just the faintest nip in the air. Cranford never looked so handsome as in the autumn; it was the time of year that seemed to best suit its quiet dignity, its peaceful mellow beauty; the old Tudor house; the smooth lawn, sloping down to the old moat, now filled with rock plants; the two great cedar-trees; the stone sundial in the park; with its trees just turning and their golden-brown leaves gleaming in the sunshine, and the deer speckled here and there through the trees.

Here Emma was walking with the two chows running in front. She was bareheaded and held in her arms a huge bunch of reddish-hued branches of oak. Her face was pale; there were dark rings under her eyes and her step was lagging, heavy, unlike her usual springing movements. She was pensive and she held an open letter in her hand. She whistled to the dogs, who were far in front, and sank down to rest on a fallen tree. She re-read the letter.

“DEAR EMMA,

“Dick has written to ask me down to shoot. Before I accept I want to have your permission. If it would cause you any pain I would rather not come.

“Yours sincerely,

“DAVID SEYMOUR.”

She tore it up and buried the fragments under the fallen leaves. Then she pencilled a reply on half a sheet of note-paper which she produced from her pocket.

“DEAR DAVID,

“Why on earth should I mind your coming down here? Accept by all means, as Dick is already deeply hurt by your extraordinary behaviour to him lately.

“Yours sincerely,

“EMMA CRANFORD.”

She placed it in a stamped envelope, addressed it, and continued her walk through the park to the post office. On her return she met Dick.

“What lovely leaves!” he cried, looking at her armful. “Are they for the hall?”

“Yes. Oh, Dick, I have been looking for you everywhere! That poor woman at the bottom of the orchard—the new under-gardener’s wife,

you know—had a baby last night; it was premature, and there was nothing prepared! Mrs. Mack has just been up to the house to tell me about it. I met her coming away. I feel I ought to do something to help her. She's very bad, I'm afraid."

Dick frowned anxiously.

"You mustn't go and see her yourself, darling!" he said. "Not now," he added, with a fond, proud look at her.

Emma pouted. Her condition made her impatient. It seemed that she was not allowed to do anything; every pleasure was debarred, and for the first time in her life she felt ill, spiritless; it was too bad, she said to herself, that so normal a thing as having a baby should entail so much suffering and self-denial. All the summer she had felt too languid to play tennis and now, when the hunting season was so soon to start again, she was forbidden to ride. Even her last resource, the harmless amusement of watching herself play *Lady Bountiful*, was to be taken away from her. She had a strange longing to visit the sick woman and to hold the new-born baby in her arms.

"I shall go and see her," she declared petulantly. "Why shouldn't I?"

Dick was gentle and forbearing with her.

"It might upset you, you see, darling," he explained patiently.

"All this fuss about a silly old baby!" pouted Emma.

"Oh, Emma!"

His shocked, pained expression irritated her. She laughed mockingly at him.

"I know you like children just as much as I do, really," he continued. "It's only a pose, this manner of yours!"

"Then why look so shocked at me?" asked Emma crossly. "Oh, you do annoy me! You have all the pride and glory and excitement of it, and I have all the bother and the drudgery and the pain! Are you giving up hunting this season, I'd like to know? Are you going to lose your looks?" She paused, and then in a low, tense voice, she added: "If it's a son, then it's worth it, every bit. But if it's a girl, I shan't care for it a scrap!"

"You shouldn't say such things even in fun," protested Dick. "You know they aren't true!"

"You're a prig!" said Emma and then, as he turned away looking hurt, she ran after him and took his arm. "Dick! I didn't mean it!"

I'm sorry ! I'm nervy and irritable, you mustn't pay attention to what I say !"

He kissed her.

" Bless you, darling ! I don't mind what you say !"

They strolled along together, arm-in-arm.

" I haven't heard from David yet," said Dick. " It's tiresome of him, because I want to fix up the shoot."

" I expect he'll wire," said Emma, without looking at him.

She walked along in silence, deep in thought. Then she heaved a deep sigh.

" What is it, darling ?"

" This world is a terribly conflicting riddle, isn't it ? D'you think there's any way of solving it ? Is there anyone at the head of it all, who understands what it's all about, and what we're here for ?"

" I expect it's rather like a big jig-saw puzzle, darling," answered Dick simply. " I think that somehow in the end every little bit fits in somewhere, till it makes a complete picture."

Emma sighed again.

" You are very trustful," she said wistfully.

" Oh, I don't know ! Somehow I know it's all for the best," said Dick. " But whatever put

such deep thoughts into your head on a lovely morning like this? By Jove! it's good enough to be alive to-day, so don't let us trouble our heads over abstruse problems about anything. Let's go round to the stables. Come on!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE Greysons, Hughie Trevor, Angela Lumley and David were the week-end guests. They arrived in the evening to find a brightly blazing log-fire in the oak hall. They gathered round it gratefully; the sun had gone in early and the evening was chilly. At first Emma had not dared to look at David, but now she stole a glance at him, warming his hands by the fire. He seemed to her just as young as ever; she thought he was perhaps a little broader across the shoulders, but his sleepy, laughing eyes and croaky, drawling voice were exactly the same. He was laughing at Angela, who had already started to bully Hughie by informing him that his tie clashed with his nose.

"But it's such a beautiful, rich purple," protested Hughie, in an aggrieved whine.

"Yes, and so is your nose," retorted Angela.

"What a beast you are!" exclaimed Hughie. "I'm jolly cold, so no wonder my nose is mauve. I daresay yours is, too, if we could see it without its camouflage."

Emma tried to make David look at her, but he would not. She turned to Priscilla Greyson.

"Well, what's the London scandal?" she asked.

Priscilla unwound her floating black veil and drew off her grey suede gloves.

"Well, my dear, in brief: Benjy was seen at Deauville this summer with the Spink sisters—you know, the ones that made such a hit in *Bells and Bows*—when he was supposed to be doing a cure at Bath—and Cynthia has got a German princess permanently quartered with her, and Lovitt says he's already fed up with having to curtsy out of the room backwards after breakfast every morning! And Benjy has given Sadie a new string of pearls to square her over the Spink sisters' scandal! And Gordon Hereford is tremendously taken up with an artist's model in Chelsea, a lovely little thing, like a Kirchner girl; they say he's teaching her a few h's and then he's going to marry her! And Tim Nestor has eloped with a girl in a tobacconist's shop—and his family are tearing their hair, because the silly fool has gone and married her! and—I think that's all!"

"Oh, Priscilla, you're wonderful!" laughed Emma, as she led her away to her room to dress for dinner.

"I've always suspected Priscilla of supplying the *Pratler* with the more scurrilous bits of society scandal," Hughie called after them, "and now I'm positive. I recognize her touch!"

All through dinner Emma found her eyes straying down the table to David, talking and laughing with Angela. He seemed in very good spirits, but never once did he vouchsafe a glance in her direction. If she addressed a remark directly to him, he answered politely, but formally, as if she were a stranger and he was now meeting her for the first time. Emma was magnetized by his lazy, sleepy grace, the indefinable charm which clung about his smallest movement. She was piqued by his indifference, and this acted on her like a spur. Her languor fell from her; she felt her vitality ebbing back to her, tingling through her veins. She became the inspiration, the centre of the party, the pivot round which they all turned. She managed them all, except David; and there she seemed to have lost her touch; she wondered if perhaps she had forgotten the way. She remembered the time when he would look up at her at the slightest flicker of her eyelid, would respond to her unspoken thought. A sort of madness swept through her blood; she put forth every effort to attract him. Dick, looking at her laughing and joking at the head of the table, thought he had never seen her look so beautiful, and Priscilla, noticing Emma's dancing eyes and bright flushed face, told Tony afterwards that the marriage which she had so cleverly

brought about had turned out a tremendous success.

The next morning Emma paid for her exuberance of the previous evening by a fit of profound depression. The guns had all breakfasted early, and Emma came down to breakfast alone.

It was a very raw morning for the time of year; there had been a slight frost, and the cold increased Emma's depression. She looked forward to nothing; before her stretched a blank vista of empty, dreary days devoid of all enjoyment. She pictured to herself a winter at Cranford without hunting and wondered how she would live through it. When the leaves began to fall and evenings grew dark and damp, she had always yearned for the lights of Piccadilly Circus; the roar of the traffic, the happy, busy crowds jostling and pushing along towards the theatres, the illuminated advertisements: the lady in the car, with the wheels going round and round and her feather blowing in the wind, and the bottle of Sandeman's Port that slowly empties as it is poured out, absurdly fascinating to watch—she loved it all!

This morning everything went wrong. To begin with, both Angela and Priscilla were late for breakfast, and Emma was in no mood to be left alone. Secondly, the coffee was cold, because

the light under the breakfast-heater had gone out. Suddenly it came over her that she loathed the very sight of the breakfast service—insipid purple flowers on a white ground; and it seemed to her that the Cranford ancestors, suspended round the walls of the dining-room, were staring down upon her reproachfully. One especially—an old lady in an Elizabethan ruff, and a stiff dress embroidered with pearls, with a long upper lip and disapproving cold blue eyes—annoyed her. Emma, helping herself to a boiled egg, looked up and encountered her stony stare. She hurled the egg at the picture, crying “There! Take that, you old prig!” It struck the old lady on the nose, but, fortunately for Emma, was a hard-boiled egg, considerably warmed up after the first breakfast by a well-trained and dutiful kitchenmaid, and it made no impression on the family portrait. Emma picked up the fragments of broken eggshell and a pulpy mass of what was once a hard-boiled egg, feeling rather ashamed of herself, but she felt decidedly better after her outburst, and when Priscilla and Angela came down a few minutes later, they found her presiding over the breakfast table, a charming and gracious hostess.

Later in the morning they walked through the woods, and joined the men for lunch in an old disused barn, close by a farm-house. David

was kneeling on the ground when they arrived fondling one of the spaniels, which had hurt its foot slightly.

"There, there, darling! Poor old lady!" he murmured, rubbing his cheek against the spaniel's silky head.

Emma stood by and listened to his tender, crooning voice.

"Oh, if he would only speak to me like that!" she said to herself hungrily. "He has never used one word of endearment to me, except once, in a letter!"

She had never thought it possible that his voice could be so soft and tender. All the afternoon Emma tramped through the woods with the men, in order to be near David, and to hear his voice. She was back in the meshes of the old infatuation.

After tea that evening Hughie sat down at the piano. He began playing the tune Emma had loved so much at Smallborough—"Autumn Sunset." It brought back the scene so vividly to her that she felt a lump rising in her throat, and she felt a tear splash on her hands, lying in her lap. David suddenly got up and left the room without a word, and Emma thrilled at the knowledge that at least he had remembered the old tune.

She dressed early for dinner and came downstairs, intending to read a book by the fire. It was dark and the servants had not yet brought the candles. As she pushed open the drawing-room door, she bumped into someone coming out. A familiar smell of homespun tweed, tobacco, leather, and a sleepy puppy—the indefinable smell of David—came to her nostrils and with it an aching longing which had to be satisfied. She stretched up her hands and pulled his head down to hers, and their lips met. Then he disengaged himself roughly, and Emma crept towards the fire trembling and ashamed. What would the servants have thought if they had seen her? Or one of the house-party? Or Dick? She blanched at the thought of Dick—her husband, the man whose child she was bearing, Dick who trusted her and had given her everything—what a cad she was! She shivered and crouched lower over the friendly blaze.

When Dick came down there was a worried frown on his face.

“David is seedy,” he said. “Caught a chill, I expect. Got a shivering fit, so I’ve sent him to bed.”

Her heart leapt within her.

“Is he bad?”

“Oh, no, only cold and shivering. Perhaps

you'd better go up and see the boy, darling—you're better at this kind of thing than I am."

"Oh, Dick, Dick! how you trust me!" cried Emma inwardly. "You are throwing temptation into my way with both hands."

"I'll go up and see him, then," she said quietly, and she hurried out of the room.

She opened David's door very softly and crept in. He was lying in bed, with his hands clasped across his eyes, as they were when he lay beside her on the sands at Smallborough. The moment he saw Emma he thrust his arms under the bedclothes, covering himself up to the chin.

"Are you ill, David?" asked Emma tremulously.

He shook his head, but did not speak. His eyes wandered over her gleaming shoulders and rested on her soft, palpitating, creamy throat.

"Have you got a hot-water bottle?" she asked, clinging to the commonplace, but her voice was charged with tenderness.

He nodded. He was pale, and there were dark shadows under his eyes; Emma's heart was flooded with tenderness at the sight.

"I'll send you up some hot soup and a wing of partridge," she continued unsteadily. "And I think a hot whisky toddy last thing will put you

right. . . ." Suddenly she heaved a little sigh and, kneeling down beside him, buried her face in the bed-clothes.

"Emma?" spoke David's voice gently.

She stuffed the blanket in her mouth to prevent herself from uttering the expressions of endearment which came crowding to her lips.

"Do you think you're playing the game?"

"I know I'm a cad—a low-down, grovelling, despicable cad!" came a stifled voice from the bed-clothes. "But, oh, David! I'm so miserable!"

She rose and walked quickly to the door before he had time to see her face. She ran along the passage to her room, sobbing as she went, and plunged both her hands into the water-jug. The cold water round her wrists made her gasp, but it steadied her. She looked at herself in the glass. Her face was deadly pale, and haggard like an old woman's. Hidden at the back of her dressing-table drawer she found a pot of rouge and liberally applied some with a shaking hand. Then she went downstairs and greeted the others gaily.

"I don't think there's much wrong with him," she said, laughing. "So come in to dinner, good people; I'm sure you must be hungry."

When she got down to breakfast next morning,

she discovered that David had already left by the early train.

“He left word to say he had an important business appointment in London at ten o’clock,” said Dick, looking rather perplexed. “But Sunday morning is a funny time for a business appointment, isn’t it?”

“Ah!” said Tony Greyson archly, “it all depends what sort, eh, Dick, old man?”

“The young ruffian!” said Dick, and he laughed and soon dismissed the subject from his mind.

But Emma sat looking straight in front of her, flushing and blenching guiltily. She knew she had driven him away.

CHAPTER XX

EMMA's baby was born on a radiant April day of boisterous wind and bright sunshine, a day of flying white clouds and clean, rain-swept earth, and puddles full of blue reflections.

The experience filled her with horror and amazement. It was a revelation of pain such as she had not believed existed. Her life seemed suddenly broken off. She felt that she had reached a standpoint. It struck her all of a sudden that she might be about to die. The idea, more fascinating than terrifying, loomed before her huge and solemn. The thought came to her that even if she lived this day would be a dividing line in her life. Nothing would ever be the same again, she thought, as she sat at the window watching the white clouds, like heaped-up banks of snow, chasing one another across the blue sky. The wind came and roughly shook the windows, and the creeper outside kept tapping against the panes in an irritating frenzied little movement that got on her nerves. The room was hot and stuffy, and smelled of clean, pungent disinfectants. The door of Dick's vacated dressing-

room was ajar, and she could see a white-covered table littered with green and blue bottles all different shapes and sizes, red-labelled and mysterious, and strange, cruel-looking instruments that frightened her. On a chair in front of the fire were hung a tiny vest, a long flannel, and a large, fleecy, white shawl. Her heart gave a sudden leap. Yes! It was exciting, in spite of the pain and the ugliness of it all, this waiting for a new life, these preparations for a strange human being, this welcoming of a personality as yet unknown to her. . . . A son. . . . Oh, if it were David's son about to be born, how different . . . how wonderful!

The room was stifling and the powerful anti-septic smells caught her by the throat. She flung open the window, and a rush of cold wind took her breath away, and the smell of sunlit puddles filled the room. With it there came to Emma a feeling of bitter resentment that she should be made to suffer thus, and the longing to be slim, and light, and care-free again made her heart ache. She wondered if she had ridden to hounds for the last time, across the sweet-smelling fields and the hedges and ditches, and felt for the last time that glorious, flying sensation through wind

and rain, and the longing to shout at the top of her voice for joy. . . .

All the pain, all the weight of the world were upon her. She closed her eyes, and somebody put down the window, shutting out the sweet, precious smells of the old days, the days that seemed so remote since the weariness of these last few hours. Hours? They seemed more like years—years of torture, and horrible, frightening helplessness. Her brain was moving with astonishing rapidity and lucidity. Her thoughts were clear-cut and visionary. All the knowledge of the universe seemed suddenly hers. Suffering, weariness, loneliness—above all the feeling of loneliness predominated. Not physical loneliness, for she was surrounded by kind, helpful people all concentrated on trying to do their best for her, and poor Dick was continually knocking at the door, wistful and helpless, asking them how she was, imploring to be allowed to sit with her. It was the still, cold loneliness of the soul that enveloped her, the knowledge that she must go through this terrible experience entirely alone. If she were to die, she must face the dark unknown in this groping solitude. Even if Dick, and her father, and all her friends were to die at the same moment, she knew she would still have to meet Death alone. There was not

one vast, crowded Gateway, but a narrow, dark, lonely Valley for each separate soul. A deep understanding flashed upon her, a realization of the impenetrable solitude in which each human being comes into the world and lives and dies. Beyond that, perhaps the barriers would break away . . . who could tell? . . . And the day wore on, the sunshine went out, the evening shadows spread themselves across the house like great, grey wings. . . .

A sweet, penetrating, choking smell—a feeling of suffocating breathlessness—a loud drumming in her ears—an incredibly noisy, a Gargantuan Jazz Band very close beside her—and now her heart was pounding wildly, and she was riding at the highest fence she had ever seen in her life—lean back, lean back—now over!—and never landed, only soared away higher and higher—and now a wonderful garden filled with heavy-scented red roses and deep peace, and then—nothing. . . .

When she came out of the anæsthetic, the blessed sense of release swept over her, swiftly followed by a sudden realization of the strange new experience, and an absurd feeling that she was the first woman in the world to whom this had happened.

"Is it a boy?" she asked.

"Yes. A very fine child, Lady Cranford."

Emma heaved a sigh of relief.

"I'm the type of woman who always has sons," she murmured complacently.

They brought the infant to her bedside, a big, red-faced baby, with carrotty-coloured hair and staring blue eyes.

Emma looked at it in silence. She experienced none of that rush of maternal love which she had so often read about in novels.

"He hasn't got any eyelashes," she observed, with a sigh, at the end of her critical scrutiny.

"Won't he ever have any?"

The nurse flushed indignantly, more as if it were her baby than Emma's.

"He's a beautiful baby," she said, as she took him away.

Old Lady Cranford swept into the room holding her head high.

"He's a Cranford all over!" she proclaimed, and, hovering over the bed like a bird of prey, she swooped down and implanted a kiss on Emma's forehead. Her dearest dream was now realized: Dick was provided with an heir.

When his mother had driven off in triumph

to the dower-house, Dick tiptoed softly into Emma's room and stood gazing down upon her adoringly.

"I told you I should have a son!" said Emma boastfully.

"Darling—you are wonderful!" murmured Dick, kissing her hands.

She lay back and closed her eyes. Her body, pleasantly tired and languid, tingled now with exultation. "My son," she said to herself, over and over again, burning with a new, strange feeling of possession. Her mind rushed impatiently past his babyhood; already she saw him as a little boy, in short knickerbockers and a jersey; she passed her hand over his straight back, and felt the little hollow down the middle, between his small, flat shoulder blades. She gave him curly hair, and laughing, shining eyes that looked into hers square and straight; she powdered his soft, flushed cheeks with golden freckles. She saw him active, restless, never still, his sturdy brown legs scampering after a ball on the lawn, running all over the house. Now she saw him riding round the field on his pony, fearless and daring as she was herself. . . .

A knock on the door scarcely roused her from her happy dreams. She was conscious that Dick

had tiptoed across the room, and hazily aware of whispers outside the door. Then she felt him standing beside her again, and she lazily opened her eyes.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she murmured.

"What, my darling?"

"That it's a boy."

"I thought you were asleep, darling."

"Oh no. Only thinking. I'm *so* happy."

She thought she heard him catch his breath, and looked up quickly. How pale he was!

"What's the matter, Dick?"

"Nothing. Nothing. Why d'you ask?"

Poor Dick! He made such a desperate effort to obey their instructions. "Keep it from your wife to-night," they had said. "Behave as though nothing had happened." But he was the most transparent of people, and it was no good hoping to conceal anything from Emma. She was too quick for him.

"You must tell me, Dick! You're keeping something from me, I know you are!"

"Lie down, darling—keep calm. You must keep calm. Oh, Emma, don't get so agitated—it's so bad for you!"

"Then tell me quickly." She held her breath

for a moment, then "It's the baby!" she exclaimed, her eyes dark with a sudden dread. She sat up in bed, clutching him with both hands. "There can't be anything wrong with him! He's a beautiful, healthy baby."

Dick stared at the wall above her head with miserable, unseeing eyes.

"Can't you speak? Are you dumb?" cried Emma, working herself up into a rage.

He moistened his pale, dry lips.

"They say there's something wrong with it," he forced himself to say.

"Nonsense! He's the strongest baby I ever saw, beautifully healthy and normal. They must be mad!"

Dick was in despair.

"Sister, sister!" he called out helplessly. "Come and make her Ladyship lie down. I can do nothing with her."

The nurse slipped quietly into the room.

"Lady Cranford, you really must keep quiet," she said, with gentle authority, but Emma interrupted her roughly.

"What's the matter with the baby?"

The nurse and Dick exchanged rapid glances across her bed. A cold, sick feeling came over her. They shared a terrible secret. Between

herself and them there lay something dreadful, something that was going to hurt her horribly. She harboured a feeling of bitter resentment against them both.

“What is it, what is it?” she burst out, looking from one to the other.

“Dr. Wilmott will tell you, if you will lie down,” said the nurse, compassionately.

She fetched the London specialist, a quiet, tired, over-worked little man, with kind, understanding blue eyes, and gentle, healing hands. He sat on her bed, and Emma listened to him in silence whilst he explained the nature of the baby’s complaint.

“He has a disease of the spine which is known as *Spina bifida*. He might live for a few weeks, but he would always be sickly, and slowly dying all the time. An operation might save his life—we are going to operate immediately—but it’s my duty to tell you that it is satisfactory only in very few cases—it is almost always hopeless.”

Emma was half dazed. She was bewildered, because things always went right for her, and she could not understand that anything terrible could happen to her.

“He won’t die. He will be all right,” she

told herself, staring at the pattern on the wall-paper. "It would be so cruel if he died. Fate *couldn't* be so cruel. He'll live. I know he will."

She lay there for an hour, willing her baby's life to be spared; Dick sat beside her, not daring to speak, hardly daring to breathe. His cheeks were pallid, sagging round his mouth; his eyes had heavy pouches under them; he looked like a man of sixty. At last the door opened, and Dr. Wilmott came to her bedside. Something in his air of exhaustion told Emma the truth.

"He's dead," she whispered, her eyes searching his grave, pale face.

He bowed his head silently.

She burst into rending sobs and buried her face in the pillow.

"Emma, my darling, don't take it so hardly!" cried Dick, flinging himself on his knees beside her. "You'll have another son, my precious, so don't cry. You are all that matters, and you must take care of yourself, and try to be brave."

"Ah, yes!" Emma flung at him from her pillow, "it's easy enough for you to talk! Have *you* been through the long dreary months of

waiting—have *you* been tortured with hours and hours of agony? What do you know about it? You're a man! To have gone through all that for nothing—it's cruel, it's cruel! I never want another baby, never, never, never!"

CHAPTER XXI

SUBCONSCIOUSLY Emma felt herself responsible for the death of the baby; at the back of her mind there lay a dim, unformed thought, an uncomfortable fear that if she had been perfectly happy and calm in herself, if she had not fretted about David, and given way to moods of melancholy and fits of temper, the child might have been stronger. The baby's death spelt failure for her, and Emma hated failure, so she dismissed the pitiful subject from her mind, rooted it out of her life, pretended it had never been. All the pathetic little reminders, the small, beautifully-made garments, the frilly pink bassinette, everything that could possibly recall her sorrow to her mind was put away out of sight by other hands than Emma's. Just as she had turned away from all that poor Nibs had left behind, so, in her instinctive desire to avoid pain, she now turned her back on everything that might remind her of a passage in her life which had left her with no tenderness, no sweet regrets, but rather with a shudder of repulsion and horror, a dread at the possibility that in spite of her health and youth she might continue to bear sickly children.

The first thing she did on recovering her strength was to get away from Cranford. She persuaded Dick to take her to London, where she plunged into the "season"; danced, dined, feverishly bought clothes, went to Ascot, to Henley, to Goodwood, to Cowes, and then up to Scotland in August on a round of visits. She was never alone; she never thought; she never dropped her social mask for a second, even to Dick. But he, gazing at her with adoring eyes, saw only her gay, laughing manner, her way of saying quick, amusing things, her affectionate, caressing attitude towards himself, which had lately grown so much warmer; he never noticed the tired look in her eyes, the sharpened outlines of her face and figure, the hard lines round her mouth, the artificial colour in her cheeks and the forced ring in her laughter.

Emma postponed their return to Cranford for as long as she could. She made Dick take her to Paris in September for a week. Emma bought more clothes than she could possibly need; they went to theatres and restaurants night after night; and Dick enjoyed it all for her sake, although at times he could not help remembering that he was missing the early shooting at Cranford, and was secretly homesick.

He bought a magnificent ermine cloak for

Emma the day before they came away, and when he presented it to her, as a surprise, she electrified him by suddenly bursting into tears. He was deeply touched and thought how loving, and grateful, and tender-hearted she was. He told himself he was the luckiest man in Christendom to have such a wife. That same evening he received an invitation from Agatha Seymour inviting him and Emma to a dance she was giving at Claridge's, to celebrate David's coming of age. It was a shy, diffident little note, full of suppressed embarrassment, and an unspoken desire that he might know how far from glad she was to think that her son was still heir to Cranford.

"I hope Emma is quite strong again. I am afraid it was a great sorrow to her losing her baby, but of course there are certain to be lots more," she wrote, and then, as if suddenly overcome by her own indelicacy, she ended up abruptly. Dick did not show the letter to Emma, for he had noticed how sensitive she was with regard to well-meant suggestions about successors to the poor little dead baby whom she never mentioned; but he told her of the invitation in the middle of dinner at the Ritz, and he noticed she turned quite pale and displayed a great reluctance to go. He wondered if Agatha had offended her in some way. He knew women were odd creatures, quick

to take offence, and slow to forgive. Then his mind reverted to David's last visit to Cranford; he remembered how abruptly it had terminated, and concluded Emma had been offended by David's rudeness. He explained, timidly, that he felt it was his duty to attend David's twenty-first birthday party.

"Hang it all," he protested, in the middle of all Emma's feeble excuses, "he's my godson, and his father was like a brother to me—I can't refuse!"

In the end Emma bowed her head to the inevitable.

"Oh, if you feel like that about it, let's go by all means," she said, rather ungraciously.

"Not if you don't want to, darling," replied Dick.

"Of course I want to. Why should I object?" asked Emma.

"I wondered if you had quarrelled with David, or something——" said Dick.

"How ridiculous!" exclaimed Emma. "No, I was only thinking it would be rather a bother having to stay the night in London. I know you hate leaving Cranford even for one night."

"Do you hate it too?" he asked her, eagerly.

"Yes," she answered, to please him. "I'm longing to get back there again."

His face lit up.

"Darling!" he whispered.

For all her seeming reluctance, when the evening of the party arrived, Emma spent a long time over her toilette; she wore a beautiful dress which she had brought back from Paris with her. Her eyes were shining, and her pale cheeks judiciously rouged. As she pushed her way through the crowd, several people turned to look at her.

"That's Emma Durville, the actress," she heard one man say to the woman he was with, and her heart beat fast with pleasure. She was delighted to hear herself called by the old name, and to know that the old Emma had not been forgotten. Agatha greeted her affectionately.

"How she would hate me if she knew!" thought Emma, enfolded in Agatha's soft, motherly embrace.

Her friends rushed up to her and surrounded her.

"How lovely she looks to-night!" exclaimed Agatha, turning to Dick.

"She does look well, doesn't she?" he acquiesced, trying to disguise his proud admiration, as his eyes rested on Emma, talking and laughing in the centre of a group of friends, childishly

excited and pleased to be made such a fuss of again.

David slid across the parquet floor, to his feet, and gripped him by the hand.

“Dear old Dick! I can’t thank you enough for these!” he said, eagerly, patting his shirt-front, adorned by two beautiful pearl studs, Dick’s birthday-gift. “It was a simply topping present!”

Emma floated up to David, her eyes dilated with excitement, her lips scarlet.

“Well, David, when are you going to dance with your old cousin Emma?”

He hesitated.

“You’d better do it soon, and get it over,” she suggested.

Her feet were tapping impatiently on the floor; she swayed into his arms, and he had no choice but to dance off with her. Emma floated round the room with closed eyes; her heart was beating tumultuously.

“Cling to this moment, cling to it!” she cried to herself. “It will soon pass for ever, so while it lasts make the most of it. Treasure it up, to remember afterwards——” She never spoke a word until the music stopped. Then she heaved a deep sigh and wondered if he had heard it.

“For God’s sake, get me an ice!” she cried in the false, exaggerated manner she had lately adopted. “I’d sell my soul for one.”

She glanced quickly round the room for Dick. Ah! there he was, chatting to a persistent dowager in royal blue satin—Emma made a face at him as she and David pushed their way into the refreshment-room, where they came upon a waiter serving out strawberry ices by the score, two empty chairs, and the solitude which is sometimes easier to find in a crowd than anywhere else.

“It’s an awful bore, this old party,” said David, sinking into a chair and mopping his brow. “Such an effort, you know. But Mother wanted it so much that I gave in, in the end. One has to with Mother, somehow. . . .”

“Does she adore you? I suppose she does,” said Emma, and the wistful note in her voice made David grow suddenly grave.

“I say, Emma—I was awfully sorry about—the baby, you know,” he said with averted eyes.

“Why were you sorry? I should have thought you were the very person who ought to have been glad!” said Emma, in a hard, bitter voice.

David stared at her a moment, blankly; then, as her meaning dawned on him, his face flamed

and he was speechless. Emma thought he was blushing for her bad taste.

"Forgive me," she cried quickly, "I didn't mean it! I can't think what made me say such a mean, vulgar, spiteful thing." Her voice broke, and David thought for a moment that she was going to burst into tears. "I don't think I can be well, lately. I've said so many things I never meant to say."

"You're thinner, but otherwise you look all right," said David, glancing at her sideways.

"My cheeks are rouged," said Emma defiantly, "I've lost two stone lately. Look!" She held out her hand and shook it gently; her engagement ring slipped off her finger and fell to the floor.

David returned it without looking at her.

"What does Dick say about it?"

"Dick?" she laughed. "He hasn't noticed!"

"Hasn't noticed what?" said a voice behind them, as Dick pushed his way to their side.

"The new way of doing my hair," answered Emma glibly. "Confess, Dick! You hadn't noticed, had you?"

"I noticed you looked lovely, darling," whispered Dick, bending over her; then he remembered his duty, which was to take some sandwiches

and a glass of claret-cup to the tenacious dowager in blue satin, and Emma and David were again left alone.

David had been watching her out of his sleepy, half-closed eyes; her quickly-assumed gaiety; her light, airy manner of telling a falsehood; it came so naturally to her that he could not help guessing that practice had perfected her in the art of lying to her husband.

"She wouldn't have lied to me," was his silent comment. "She'd have known it wasn't any use. I can read her very soul, and she knows it!"

Emma sat motionless, with her eyes fixed on the little frosted-glass ice-plate balanced on her knee. The strains of a waltz floated through the open doors.

"So you're twenty-one to-day!" she said, after a long pause.

"Yes. It's a great occasion, isn't it?"

"You've 'come of age,' David. D'you feel of age?"

"Of immense age!"

"You look it! Dear little David! I hope you'll be happy and good! Take the advice of your old cousin Emma, David darling, and don't —"

Her soft cooing voice died away as David sprang

abruptly to his feet. The old fascination swept over him and he was once more swamped by Emma's personality.

"Let's go and dance," he said between his teeth, and gripping her hand fiercely, he led her back into the ball-room.

"What, again, David?" she demurred, catching sight of Dick standing by the other door waiting for her, but David swung her out into the middle of the floor, and she yielded herself to him without another word.

After that they danced almost every dance together. David seemed to be in a dream. His eyes were two smouldering little slits in his pale face; he was silent, and in between the dances he drank a good deal of champagne. Emma, on the contrary, was very gay and talkative, but when she was dancing with him her eyelids drooped heavily over her shining eyes and her mouth was a passionate red.

"Are you tired, darling?" asked Dick, timidly, coming up to them during one of the intervals, and plucking at her floating sleeve, a diffident, appealing, rather pathetic gesture.

"No, no!" cried Emma impatiently. "If you're getting sleepy go home to bed, darling. Don't wait up for me!"

Dick returned to Agatha's side. He had never

cared much for dancing, and now he felt it would be absurd to start.

“David seems to be dancing nearly every dance with my wife!” he said, laughing. “I shall soon be getting jealous!”

Agatha echoed his laugh rather feebly, and her eyes suddenly filled with anxiety, even with fear, as they followed her son round the room, and rested on his partner’s supple, swaying body; something about the pose of her head, thrown back, and her red lips, slightly parted, filled her with a queer concern. She looked quickly at Dick, seated next to her, also following the young couple round the ball-room, in and out of all the others, with smiling eyes. He seemed so unconcerned, so pleased that they should be together, that Agatha felt a pang of shame, and she told herself sternly that she was turning into the suspicious old mother, always thinking that every young woman must necessarily be falling in love with her son, a type which Agatha had always despised.

“This is the last dance I can give you, David,” said Emma, suddenly becoming aware of Agatha’s keen eyes following them round the room.

“You’re the only woman I’m going to dance with to-night!” answered David obstinately.

"If you won't dance with me, I shan't dance at all!"

Emma flung back her head, bending back from the waist, to get a better view of his face as they danced, and as she met his downward gaze, she felt a sharp pain, like an electric shock, course through her body, and she felt she was swooning in his arms for joy. It was soon three o'clock, and they came to tell David that the band was going.

"One more dance—they must play one more dance!" said David peremptorily; and he crossed the room and arranged it with them himself.

"This is the last," he murmured, as he and Emma swayed round the room together, and she raised her eyes to his with an inscrutable expression in them. "Are you sorry, Emma?" he whispered huskily.

"No—I think I'm glad!" said Emma, so low that he had to bend his head to catch the words.

The band played "God save the King." Emma wondered if it was her imagination that made it seem that Agatha looked at her rather queerly as she bade her good-night. In a dream she got into the car; Dick sat down beside her and took possession of her hand; she

felt numb and far away; her brain refused to work. She sat there with her cold hand in Dick's, gazing out of the window. It had been raining, and the lamps were reflected in the puddles all the way along the wet, shining road. Dick was very chatty.

"Did you enjoy it, darling?"

"Yes—awfully."

"Rather a good show, I thought. Jolly good band and a topping supper. I liked those little jelly things with lobster cream inside! D'you know the little fellars I mean? I ate about six of 'em!"

And as he rambled on, Emma was thinking:

"I wish I could have kissed him. I wish he had made love to me. I wish he had told me what he really feels towards me. We danced every dance together! What did people think? Damn them! What do I care? Oh, my God! what a cad I am! I think I must be mad!"

"Old Lady Topham managed to get in three suppers," Dick's cheerful voice broke in, full of reluctant admiration. "No wonder she's getting so stout!"

"David—David—David——" Emma kept on repeating his name to herself.

"You and David get on awfully well together

now, don't you?" said Dick contentedly. "I thought once that you didn't seem to like him much!"

Emma suddenly woke out of her dream, and she clutched Dick with both her hands.

"Oh, Dick, Dick! I'm so tired, I'm so tired," she sighed. "You'll take me back to Cranford to-morrow, won't you, Dick? I'm so tired—and I want to go back to Cranford!"

* * * * *

Agatha and David drove home from Claridge's together in silence. As Agatha kissed him good-night she sighed, and about half an hour later, while David was undressing, there was a knock at his door; his mother came in, rather shyly, in her dressing-gown. She sat on the edge of his bed, and fidgeted nervously with the corded edge of the eiderdown quilt.

"Have you had a happy birthday, darling?" she asked him tentatively, wondering how she should begin.

"Yes, thank you, Mum."

As he stood there stretching himself, he looked so slim and handsome in his blue silk pyjamas, that Agatha felt she could hardly find it in her heart to blame a woman for losing her head over him.

"David," she began, summoning up her courage.

"Yes, Mum?"

"You danced a lot with Emma to-night. . . ."

David received this remark in silence, and his mother found it difficult to proceed on so little encouragement.

"She's very attractive . . ." she ventured.

There was still no reply from David. She shot a glance at him, but she could read nothing from his impassive countenance.

"You were rather a bad host to-night, David. You never once danced with the pretty Lumley girl, or with Gladys Cufley or either of the Gordons, and you used so be so friendly with Betty——" She paused. "They must have thought it very rude of you, darling!"

"Well, Mum, I didn't want to have a dance, did I? You know dancing bores me!"

"It didn't seem to bore you dancing with Emma," returned his mother with some asperity.

"Oh well—she doesn't bother me to flirt with her, you see," said David, avoiding her eye. "All the others do, and I kept on asking you to dance with me, Mum, but you refused."

"At my age!" protested his mother, half-flattered, half-irritated by his cajoleries.

“ You’re more attractive than any of them !” he declared as he kissed her good-night, but Agatha left his room only partially satisfied.

“ Well, I don’t care what he says, I trust my instinct !” she murmured to herself, as she slipped into bed.

CHAPTER XXII

CRANFORD LODGE was a production of the good old mid-Victorian era, an unworthy successor to the old dower-house which had been burned down in the time of the seventh Earl. It had been erected upon the site by Dick's grandfather, a man of singularly little taste, but of excellent intentions and a kind heart, who built the Lodge as a respite for his wife from a tyrannical and interfering mother-in-law, in the style which he naturally thought would most please her early Victorian heart. The stucco walls, the heavy portico and the hall, with its ornate pillars, its gold-embossed paper, its antlers, and its Landseer pictures, were still considered beautiful by Dick and his mother. One could hardly take a step in the drawing-room, for fear of knocking over one of the numerous display tables, littered with fans, silver ornaments, red plush photograph-frames, old miniatures, enamel snuff-boxes, and ivory paper-knives. Each china ornament on the heavily-decorated mantelpiece stood upon a lace doyley of its own, and the grand piano was draped in silk embroideries, typical of a century when even the legs of a piano offered an offence

to delicacy. Instinctively, as one entered the room one mentally assumed the high-waisted frock-coat, the long, tight trousers, the cravat, and the tall hat of the period.

Here, about a week after the dance at Claridge's, old Lady Cranford was having tea with her son, who had ridden over from Cranford. Dick, looking absurdly out of place in his top-boots and riding-breeches, was sitting in an uncomfortable red velvet arm-chair, balancing a cup-and-saucer on his knee with more skill than grace.

"And where's Emma?" inquired the old lady in her sharp, rasping voice, fixing her cold, steely eye upon him in a manner which even now, forty-seven though he was, filled him with apprehension.

"She was too tired to come over this afternoon," he stammered, avoiding her piercing gaze, and rendered uncomfortable by the recollection of Emma's careless excuses, unconvincing and numerous, to get out of paying a visit to her mother-in-law. "She has been rather easily tired just lately," he added lamely.

"Ah! I'm glad to hear it!" observed his mother, with grim satisfaction. "And I hope this time will prove more successful than the last!"

"It isn't—we aren't——" he began in great confusion.

“Eh?” grunted Lady Cranford sharply. “Then more’s the pity. It’s about time Emma had another baby!”

“It’s very soon after the other—and she had such a shock last time,” mumbled Dick, fidgeting uneasily in his chair under his mother’s upbraiding glances.

“Nonsense, my dear boy! Soon, indeed! Why, you and poor Lindsay were within ten months of each other,” snapped out Lady Cranford, “and I consider Emma was entirely to blame for the baby’s death. She ought never to have had chloroform.”

“Oh, Mother!”

“I never did. It’s all nonsense!” she rapped out.

Dick relapsed into angry silence.

He was beginning to realize at last that Emma, who had subjugated everybody else, had failed completely here; but even so, he did not dream of the bitter dislike which the dowager harboured against Emma in her heart. There were so many things which she could never forgive her. Firstly and foremostly, she had captured Dick, with her flaunting physical attractions, and had thwarted all the cherished hopes, all the secret plans of his mother, who flattered herself she knew best who would make him happy. Secondly, the old lady

had never forgiven Emma for her easily-won and undeserved popularity with the village people; the dowager knew full well that Emma had never taken the same amount of interest, care and trouble over the parish as she had, and yet already they preferred a visit from Emma, so soon had they succumbed to her superficial charm. Thirdly, Emma had failed in her obvious duty; she had not provided Dick with an heir. Fourthly, and fifthly and sixthly, there was a deep-rooted mistrust and primitive sexual antagonism between the two women, who, though very different in type, had yet shared certain things in life, and who both expected to get anything and everything they wanted throughout their allotted span of years.

Dick rose to leave, with a muttered excuse. His mother suddenly laid her hand on his arm.

"Dick—I want to see you with a son of your own before I die," she said huskily, and he noticed that she looked more beaky than usual, her eyes were tired and deeply sunken, her face was pinched and yellow. He forgave her the aspersions she had cast on Emma, and kissed her a kindly good-bye.

He mounted his horse slowly and stiffly, like a man in a dream, and trotted off down the drive so deeply engrossed in his thoughts that he even

failed to notice the familiar figure of old Pearson, the coachman, with his bald head and his bowed legs, standing in the doorway of his cottage, smoking a pipe. Dick vouchsafed no reply to his cheery good-night, and the old man gazed after the retreating figure with an air of faint reproach. Removing his pipe from his mouth, he turned to his wife, standing behind him, and observed:

“His Lordship don’t get no younger, do ’ee?” He sighed heavily. “We don’t none of us get no younger.”

CHAPTER XXIII

LEFT alone for the afternoon, Emma had indulged in a mood of introspection. The dramatic instinct being developed in her to a very high degree, she formulated her thoughts in words, for they were necessities of life to her; she could build up no conclusion without them.

“I’ve made a terrific mistake, of course,” she mused, sitting on a tree-stump, among the fallen leaves in the park. “I thought I was worldly and cynical; I thought I should be so happy with all the things I’ve always longed for: pearls, and Paris clothes, and sables, and horses, and cars, and travelling first-class, and being adored, and oh, I did so want to be a countess! But now I’m bored—oh, God! I am bored! I’m awfully fond of Dick, but getting my own way always is very tedious, and sometimes a terrible loneliness comes over me, because I know it’s always I who must do everything. It’s very lonely, being the strongest.” Her thoughts flew off in another direction. “*He* is stronger than me! Somehow, he always makes me feel as if I’d

got no will of my own left. It seems to run into my knees, and they always feel weak and shaky whenever he is near me. It must be physical. Perhaps I'm a sensualist? No. I think I must be a sensationalist. What does he think of me? Oh, he must despise me. He must think—Heaven only knows. I've let him kiss me whenever he wanted to, and I've kissed him when he hasn't wanted it a bit, and——" She suddenly went back to the scene in the little flat in King's Road; she heard his dear, boyish voice, pleading, imploring her not to marry Dick. She wondered, not for the first time, what would have happened if she hadn't. She remembered a passage in one of his letters: "We could go away together somewhere where money doesn't matter." She smiled tenderly. "Oh, David! is there such a place?" she said aloud, shaking her head. The sweetness, the charm of him swept over her suddenly, and large tears rolled slowly down her cheeks. "If it weren't for the fact that it would ruin his life—his dear, wonderful young life that counts for so much—I'd go to him now if he wanted me!" she said to herself. "I'd give up everything for one month with him." She conjured him up before her, pictured him as she had seen him lying in bed, with his soft, tousled brown hair on the pillow; and she longed, absurdly, to

darn his socks, to fold up the clothes which he had just taken off, to perform some humble, intimate, personal little service for him. It had never before occurred to her that people could feel as she felt now. "So this is love, then," she told herself, and even in the midst of her pain, she felt a glorious self-complacency to think that she had not missed this thing which had come to her. . . . It was growing chilly, so she rose, and wandered slowly towards the house, kicking the withered brown leaves as she went, and deriving a sort of melancholy satisfaction from the rustling sound they made under her feet. She felt suddenly lonely, and she looked forward to tea beside a cheerful log fire, and she hoped Dick would soon be back from Cranford Lodge, because she had sat long enough alone with her thoughts, and she now wanted somebody to talk to. When she got in, she found it was five o'clock, and Dick not yet returned. She sat down by the fire, and ate her buttered scones, and drank her China tea, in solitude. Without knowing why, she felt uneasy and restless; she sat down at the piano, and allowed her hands to wander idly over the keys, but the tunes they chose to play were so sad that she found herself nearly weeping. She shut down the

keyboard, walked over to the bookcase, and ran her eyes along the shelves, wondering what to choose.

"Dick is awfully late," she thought, glancing at her wrist-watch. "What can the old terror be saying to keep him so long?"

Then she was seized with a queer apprehension.

"How awful if anything has happened to him," she said to herself, and although she tried to dismiss such thoughts as absurd, the children of her excited, overwrought state of mind, yet she found herself waiting for the sound of his footsteps outside the door, longing for his cheerful whistle. And the feeling of uneasiness increased as she watched Wong prowling round the room, and sniffing anxiously underneath the door. At last, as if sensing her uneasiness, he came and laid his great head on her lap, and fixed his liquid brown eyes on hers filled with such a mournful expression that Emma felt it hard to refrain from bursting into tears.

"Oh, if Master would only walk into the room now!" she said to Wong, "I should run to him and throw my arms round his neck, and he'd be so pleased! And you'd wag your tail, and sniff him all over, wouldn't you, Wong?"

Oh, Wongie, you've nothing to reproach yourself with! You've always been nice to him. But I haven't! Never mind, I've resolved never to be horrid to him again, Wong, and when he comes back to-night——"

The sentence remained unfinished on her lips, for at that moment the door opened and admitted Browne, the old butler who had been in the family even before Dick was born, and who had faithfully accompanied the dowager when she moved to the Lodge. The old man stood on the threshold, with his hat crushed between his trembling, gnarled old hands, his silver head bowed, his thin, worn face the colour of parchment, and there clung about him the dignity of the aged. As Emma jumped to her feet, her heart seemed to turn to lead. She knew at once that he was the bearer of ill news. She turned her eyes on him questioningly, but she could not speak.

"There has been an accident, m'lady," spoke Browne in a thin, quavering voice that yet seemed brave. "His Lordship was thrown at the cross-roads——"

Emma found her voice, hoarse and strained.

"Where? Where?"

"We carried him to the Lodge, m'lady,"

continued the gentle, mournful old voice, "as it was nearer. I have come to fetch you."

"Is he——?"

"We don't know if he is alive or dead, m'lady."

His quiet, resigned, patient look of suffering helped Emma to forget herself.

"Oh, Browne! I'll come at once. Is the car there?"

"Yes, m'lady."

Just as Emma was leaving the room, Wong whined piteously, and it seemed to her that he was asking to be allowed to come too. She laid her trembling hand on his head.

"Yes, Wong. You shall come," she whispered. "After all, you're an older friend than I am!"

As she was stepping into the car, old Browne laid his hand respectfully on her arm.

"It is the will of God," he said reverently, looking into her pale, distraught face, and Emma gazed at him wonderingly as he stood there with his white head uncovered in the cold night-air, and the lamps of the car casting strange shadows across his tired, patient old face, and it struck her that he must understand something which to her was still a cruel enigma, and she envied him

in his many weary years. During the drive through the dark, shadowy park Emma sat with Wong's warm body pressed against her knee, bargaining with a relentless, angry God.

"If You will only let him live, God, I will swear to be a better wife to him in future," she whispered over and over again until she reached the Lodge.

The car pulled up in front of the stucco porch. It seemed to Emma that Browne was taking an hour to move from his seat beside the chauffeur, and that she was endlessly staring at the laurel bushes flanking the piece of gravel drive lit up by the headlights of the car. Her clarity of vision was suddenly intensified, her sense of hearing extraordinarily acute. As Browne opened the door of the car it seemed to make a harsh, creaking, unpleasant noise in her ear.

She pushed Wong, but he seemed disinclined to move. "Get out, darling," she said, but he pressed all the closer to her side.

A sudden terror laid its icy grip round her heart. What if it should be his animal instinct warning him not to go in there? she thought, and her burning impatience suddenly left her cold and weak

"He may be changed, unrecognizable, horrible!" she said to herself, shuddering.

A hideous picture rose up before her eyes. She visualized a terrible, mangled body, a distorted, lacerated face, blood, groans, the horrible noises of a human being in pain. Her whole nature revolted against the ugliness of it all, from which she had striven to escape all her life.

Browne's gentle cough recalled her to the fact that he was expecting her to get out.

"No, no! I won't see him—I won't see him!" she cried aloud, rocking herself to and fro and shaking all over.

"Poor young lady—she takes it very hard!" thought the old butler compassionately.

In his simplicity of mind he misinterpreted the note of horror in her voice.

"It may be all right, m'lady," he said to comfort her, because she was so young and so frightened.

"There is no way out of it. You've got to face it," clamoured a voice in Emma's brain.

She gave Wong a gentle push.

"Master!" she whispered, and he jumped out of the car, wagging his tail.

She followed him into the hall, feeling like an

animal caught in a trap. Somebody bumped against her in the semi-obscurity; she fancied it was the family doctor, but he did not speak, only opened the drawing-room door for her. She found herself creeping into the room very, very slowly, hesitating at each short step.

No terror, no ugliness . . . only a deep, oppressive stillness. . . .

Dick was lying on the red velvet sofa, with his head resting on an antimacassar. He looked as if he were asleep, except that he was so white, and his face was very noble, and peaceful, and happy. Sitting beside him, very upright, in a high-backed chair, was the dowager, and Emma read from her hard, stern, staring eyes all that there was to know. Wong went up to the sofa, and licked his master's face all over, with his soft black tongue, and then he looked up at Emma with puzzled, piteous eyes and whined. She flung herself on her knees beside him, and burst into passionate weeping. Old Lady Cranford watched the scene dry-eyed, immobile. Her first-born son was lying there pale, and cold, and stiff; and his dog was gently licking his face from time to time, and occasionally whimpering in a sorrowful way! The girl was crying. Well—let her! . . . Crying won't bring him back,

girl! He is dead. And you have failed in your duty towards him, for where is the heir to succeed him? . . . A bitter hatred crept into the old, dry eyes, as she looked down at Emma's weeping, crouching figure. Her lip curled contemptuously. It seemed almost as if she were smiling, a cruel, satirical smile, at Death, who had robbed her of all she had ever had.

CHAPTER XXIV

DAVID was in his "digs" at Oxford. He was lying back in a low, deep arm-chair, with his feet up on another. In his hands was a number of *The Autocar*, which he was studying attentively. His head was reposing on a pile of cushions, and because he considered that the gas-stove was not sending out sufficient heat, he had covered his feet with the red baize table-cloth. On the floor beside him lay a quantity of books, and a reversed ink-pot in a pool of ink. These he had pulled off the table with the table-cloth, but beyond frowning at the clatter they made in falling to the floor, the fact had not troubled him further. The violent-coloured prints suspended round the walls of the sitting-room interpreted his landlady's taste in art rather than David's, nor did he, personally, experience anything but a feeling of repulsion towards the yellow china animals on the mantelpiece and the two views of Venice, skilfully executed in mother-of-pearl, on plush brackets, which stood either side of the clock.

David turned over the leaves of *The Autocar* eagerly, until he came to the photograph of a

small racing car, when he heaved a sigh of rapture. He feasted his eyes on this model, holding the picture slightly away from his eyes and studying it from every angle.

The door behind him was flung open and a very tall, fair man, with blue eyes, and rather a weak mouth, hurled himself into the room.

"Hullo, David, you young owl, why the devil didn't you come to rowing practice this afternoon?"

David never removed his eyes from the picture of the little racing model he was gazing at so lovingly. The newcomer was only Philip Marchmont, a cousin on his mother's side, with whom he shared the "digs," and David had long ceased to treat him ceremoniously.

"Scratched my name off the list," he replied laconically.

"You are a blasted young fool, David!" observed his cousin pleasantly, standing with his legs apart, and staring down upon him from his immense height, broad-shouldered and good-natured.

"Why am I a fool?" inquired David.

"Because you are, I s'pose! You oughter 've got your Blue two years ago if you hadn't suddenly played the fool."

"Putney to Mortlake is a bit too strenuous for

the likes o' me!" yawned David, throwing down *The Autocar*, and stretching his long arms over his head. "I don't care for rowing as a pastime, and the sooner the rowing authorities realize the fact the better!"

"Yes! Last year you said you couldn't row because you wanted to work!" snorted Philip Marchmont. "A fat lot of work you did!"

"Well, I got through my exam—somehow—" murmured David, smiling to himself. "You can't deny it, old friend!"

"Oh, brilliantly!" stormed his cousin.

"Well," protested David. "I never said I had brains. We aren't clever. It isn't in the family, you know. . . ."

His tone was that of a person repudiating an unkind insinuation that there was drink in his family, or some other vice.

"Well, you're making a mess of your career at Oxford—I can't for the life of me see why you want to go and be such a mutt!"

"Oh, I'm about sick of Oxford!" exclaimed David, kicking the table-cloth off his feet.

"H'm!" grunted his cousin. "And Oxford's a bit sick of you, old son, if all I hear from certain quarters is true!"

"What? But I've only been back a week!" protested David.

"There are rumours already afloat about your roulette party last night!"

"And a very cheery little party it was, too!" smiled David. "Funny without being vulgar, if you know what I mean—smart, and yet ultra-refined; pity you weren't able to come!"

"I had a little work to do," returned Philip with dignity. His eye fell on the inky pile of books on the floor. "I say, David, look what you've done! Look at all this muck!"

He stooped and collected the books and papers together, and shook the ink off their covers.

"You're a prize pig," he mumbled, on his knees—"my books, too, damn you!"

"Sorry. I'll make you a handsome present of some more if they're spoilt," said David imperturbably. "I won a fiver last night at roulette, and I've a kind and generous nature——"

Clattering feet were heard outside, and the door burst open and admitted three large friends of Philip's.

The room seemed to shrink in size as they entered it. They greeted David heartily enough. Although they disapproved of the life he led and the set he had recently joined, it was impossible to dislike or to despise David. He had that indefinable quality called charm. In their straightforward, simple way these athletic young giants

were puzzled at David's prodigality; but it struck them that it was none of their business to remonstrate with young Seymour, so they left him to his own devices.

The conversation immediately turned on rowing, and David started to yawn. Philip's friends were very boring, he told himself, and he liked to be amused all day long. He got up, stretched himself, and sauntered towards the door.

"I'm going along to the cinema to-night with Crayshaw and Pike," he threw over his shoulder to Philip, as he slouched gracefully out of the room. "We're going to have some fun with the townees. A brilliant counter-attack has been planned, and will probably come off to-night."

Philip looked after his retreating figure with a worried pucker between his brows.

"What's the matter with David these days?" asked Miles Treherne, who had rowed in the Eight last year, and was a certainty for this year, too. "He doesn't seem to care about anything."

"He will go about with those appalling bounders, Crayshaw and Pike," commented young Spottiswoode, a Rugger blue, with a squeaky voice and good connections, and a tendency towards wanting to know the "right people."

"He was an exceptionally good oar," broke in Fleet, a serious-eyed, earnest young man, who had temporarily abandoned rowing for the sake of his work, but who had done a certain amount of "coaching" in the days when David had condescended to row. "What on earth made him drop rowing? He doesn't care to talk about anything now except the guts of racing cars!"

"I shall keep my eye on him to-night," muttered Philip, between his teeth. "I know Crayshaw and Pike and their friends!"

Miles Treherne turned abruptly to Fleet.

"What d'you think of Browne?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh, he swings across the boat, but he pushes hard," answered Fleet enthusiastically; the conversation returned to rowing, and David was temporarily forgotten.

That night Philip went down into the town, and stationed himself outside the cinematograph, just about the time when the evening performance came to an end. Soon he saw the stream of people coming out, and, crossing over the road, he pushed his way towards the exit, and waited. David brushed past him, without seeing him, and Philip could see that he had evidently dined not wisely but too well, and that his companions

were in an advanced stage of intoxication. They appeared to have been having an altercation with someone inside the building, and as they passed Philip distinctly heard David say to Pike: "Look here, let's wait here, and then we can get 'em when they come out."

At that moment a red-faced, truculent-looking young man with a bowler hat at the back of his head and a rose in his buttonhole came out, arm-in-arm with a friend, who likewise appeared to be in a state of spluttering, perspiring wrath. Directly they spied David and his companions they made a dart at them. Philip pressed after them, through the crowd, but couldn't reach David's side in time to prevent him from knocking the red-faced young man down. David was immediately set upon from all sides by confederates of his fallen adversary, and a battle royal began in the middle of the crowded street. Philip looked round him in dismay. If, to add to the long list of David's iniquities, he was seen fighting in the middle of the town, he felt things might go badly with him. In fact—it was no use blinking matters—one more complaint against him and he would certainly be sent down. Suddenly, as he stood there, undecided what to do, a newsboy jostled him roughly, and his eye fell on the headlines of the evening paper in his

hand, lit up by the glare of the lights outside the cinema.

“TRAGIC DEATH OF THE EARL OF CRANFORD,”

he read, printed across the front page in large letters. The Press had got the news even sooner than the dead man's relatives, and had immediately thrust the sad announcement into the world.

Philip felt his heart thumping against his ribs. He snatched the paper out of the boy's hand, rushed at David, and seized him by the arm.

“David!” he shouted. “Your uncle's dead—look here!”

Turning swiftly, David's eye fell on the words, printed so large that he could scarcely have missed them:

“TRAGIC DEATH OF THE EARL OF CRANFORD.”

At the same moment one of his antagonists found it too good an opportunity to be missed, and, lifting up his fist, he hit David hard on the forehead.

“You bloody coward!” cried out David, enraged at the mean, furtive attack.

Philip, at the same moment, had seen three familiar figures, tall and solid, on the outskirts of the crowd.

“Miles—here! Fleet! Spottiswoode!” he

called out loudly, and these heroes instantly sprang to his assistance, scattering the indignant townees in all directions.

David suffered himself to be led off between Philip and Miles Treherne. Outside his "digs" he paused, and swayed drunkenly to and fro, giddy from the effects of the violent blow he had received, which he was only just beginning to feel, like an iron hammer, between the eyes.

"Emma . . ." he murmured thickly, "Emma . . . but I'm not going to crawl to her feet now—I'm damned if I do!"

Then he pitched forward into Philip's outstretched arms, and silently and sympathetically they bore the new Earl of Cranford's inanimate form into his "digs," and put him to bed.

CHAPTER XXV

DURING those dreary, horrible days which followed Emma was in a dream, numbed, detached, as if it were all happening to someone else. The grim appanages of Death, the hideous ceremony which followed it, she ignored. It was not until later that she began to feel, that her heart thawed, and her brain grasped what her eyes saw. Then, just as a person in great physical pain longs for morphia, so Emma in her mental discomfort yearned for her father, for his shrewd impersonal judgment, his calm, detached attitude which refused to admit that anything mattered. Accompanied by the two chows—for although old Lady Cranford had made a resolute effort to keep Wong, he had shown such a marked preference for Emma that she had at last been forced to allow him to go to the mistress he loved—Emma went home, for the second time a widow.

It was a very different home-coming from her last, although, outwardly, there appeared a sameness which made Emma, in her nervous, highly-strung state of mind, often want to shriek with hysterical laughter. It seemed to her that her mother said exactly the same things, that her

father looked at her in exactly the same curious, quizzical way, and that Doris seemed daily to perform the very same actions as she had that last time . . . whilst to Emma herself it was all so deeply, so absolutely different. Last time she had felt so young, so tenderly and cheerfully regretful about dear Nibs; and so confident about the future, though her purse was empty and her clothes dyed and threadbare. Now, her clothes were expensive and beautiful, and her purse full; but her heart was heavy, and she dared not face her thoughts about her dead husband lest she should meet a new torture, in the shape of remorse, the ghost of What-Might-Have-Been; her life seemed over; for the first time Emma was overcome by circumstances. She crept about the house, pale and subdued, avoiding solitude, jumping whenever a door banged, a listless shadow of the Emma that was.

Her father observed her narrowly. She would look up to find his glowing black eyes fixed on her inquiringly, piercingly, as if he would read her thoughts.

“Emma, you puzzle me!” he exclaimed suddenly one day, when they were alone together. “Are you taking drugs every night?”

Emma started nervously, and her needlework flew out of her hands

"Yes, I am," she answered feebly, knowing it was useless to lie to Nicholas Durville.

"Why?"

"To make me sleep, of course," she answered, with a touch of impatience in her tone.

"Do you suffer from insomnia, at your age?"

"Ever since——"

She covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

"Emma, what is on your mind? I've been watching you carefully, and I've noticed you can't bear to be alone. You even prefer your mother's company to your own! There's something you're frightened to be alone with!"

Her father leaned back in his chair and abandoned himself to his one self-indulgence, a cigar, and something in his quiet, listening attitude, and the queer indefinable power of his personality, unloosened Emma's tongue.

"Oh, I'm so miserable!" she cried, with tears trickling down her face; "I've made such a hash of my life!"

"Emma, my poor child, you are hysterical! Even in our wildest grief let us keep to the truth! Your life has been an unqualified success—Providence is proverbially generous to the undeserving, and if we review your life in brief, we shall see that your career has been a glorious one.

Who but you could have manufactured a success on the stage out of no more than a voice, a passable figure, and a trick of bursting into tears at the right moment? Providence has further relieved you of two very dull husbands. What an ungrateful spirit you have, Emma!"

"Dick, Dick!" sobbed Emma, unrestrainedly. "He was so good to me, and I was such a bad wife!"

"I have no doubt you were," observed her father placidly.

"I was never in love with him!"

"Did he know that?"

"No—no—he thought I adored him—oh, don't smile, don't. It's torturing me—I feel such a beast now to think how I deceived him. Only a week before he was killed—at a dance—I——"

Her voice broke into sobs, and her father waited till her outburst was over, then he observed quietly:

"But as he lived and died happy, in his ignorance, why are you weeping now? Why grudge it to him?"

"There was—there was someone else I loved," said Emma breathlessly.

"Ah, so you were an unfaithful wife as well as an unloving one?"

“No, no!”

“I did not for one moment suspect you of breaking the seventh commandment, my dear,” murmured her father, smiling to himself. “Generosity was never your strong point!”

Her face flamed.

“I would have gone to him—I’d have given up everything for him—if only it wouldn’t have meant ruining his whole life!” she exclaimed, hotly.

Her father opened one eye, and fixed it on her, twinkling.

“Ah, now we come to the root of the trouble,” he smiled, placing the tips of his long, tapering fingers against each other. “Emma is in love for the first time in her life.”

“No, no! it isn’t that!” murmured Emma, her colour rising.

“Emma,” he said solemnly, wagging his finger at her, “at the end of the conventional year, we shall see you with yet a third husband!”

“Oh no! Never, never!” cried Emma, passionately. “That could never happen!”

Her father raised his eyebrows interrogatively.

“I treated him very badly—worse than I treated Dick! I behaved like a cad, but oh! I didn’t realize: when I married Dick, I had never been in love all my life, so how was I to know it

when it did come to me? I made a terrible mistake! I thought the other thing was just a passing infatuation, and I thought the worldly things would make up for it, and that I should soon forget it, but it got stronger and stronger, and now I realize I've missed the only thing in life worth having!"

"Poor little fool!" said her father, half compassionately, half contemptuously. "Well, well! It's no use brooding over the past, Emma. There's no past in the world worth losing your looks for, and I'm going to suggest that you and I take a holiday abroad, somewhere, to improve our minds, enlarge our outlook, and recover our health and beauty. What do you say?"

Emma realized for the first time how alike she and her father were in essentials, when she witnessed his boyish excitement as they left the Dover cliffs far behind them, and turned their faces towards the thin, white strip of land which was the coast of France. He smiled at her, a radiant smile that made her suddenly appreciate his charm, which she had inherited, as if to say: "We are leaving the dull, disagreeable things, the prosaic drabness of life, behind us, and we are sailing towards Sunshine and Beauty and Colour, which are your birthright and mine!"

"Oh, father!" she cried, with an excited, happy

laugh, slipping her arm through his to steady herself as the boat dipped down into the green sea, "I think you must be the Spirit of Evil himself! You've stilled my conscience, and you've made me feel that there's nothing that matters except—feeling as I do now!"

When he turned and smiled ironically at her, he did, indeed, look like the Devil, with his gleaming white teeth, his swarthy, saturnine countenance, his glowing black eyes, and his big, pointed ears showing above his turned-up collar under his cap.

"Well, is there?" he asked softly.

CHAPTER XXVI

EIGHTEEN months later found Emma returned from her travels, seated in the garden at Crow-bridge, with several letters on her lap. An intoxicating smell of spring was in the air; the daffodils were out, a thrush was singing gaily above her head, a breeze faintly smelling of violets and moist earth was fanning her flushed face. Her lips were parted, her eyelids heavy with tenderness and regret and sorrowful recollections. She took up the letters and read them through again. The first acquainted her with the death of old Lady Cranford, and affected Emma only inasmuch as it meant that an enemy had passed out of her life. Emma hated and feared an enemy. It was strange to think of that spiteful, proud, yellow, beaky face lying on a death-bed—to fancy the bitter, cantankerous old tongue still at last. Emma shuddered, and passed quickly to the next letter, from Angela Lumley, informing her of her engagement to Hughie Trevor. This made Emma smile. It was such a very characteristic epistle! The third letter filled her with mixed

feelings. It was from Agatha Seymour, and ran thus:

“DEAR EMMA,

“I hear you have returned from abroad, and am writing to ask you to come and stay a few nights with me. *I am all alone this week*, and I should so love to have you. There are several things I very much want to talk over with you. Wire and let me know the earliest you can come.

“With love,

“Yours affectly.,

“AGATHA.”

“What can she want to ‘talk over’?” murmured Emma to herself. The thrush had finished his song and was now hopping about on the lawn in front of her. She watched it idly. “Shall I go?” She glanced at the words “I shall be all alone,” and wondered what Agatha had meant by underlining them. There was no mention of David, and Emma felt her heart beat fast with curiosity and longing to know what had become of him. She looked across at the daffodils swaying in the breeze, and the joy of spring rushed through her veins. “Oh, I shall go,” she decided suddenly, and she went into the house to put on a hat, and then walked down to the village to send off a telegram, worded:

“Delighted to come to-morrow, about tea-time.”

She arrived in London about four o'clock, and as she drove in the taxi towards Agatha's little house in Knightsbridge, she sniffed in the smell of London and felt herself intoxicated by it.

"I adore London!" she said to herself. "I shall take a flat and live here!"

Agatha greeted her tenderly. Emma noticed that she was looking much older; her dark hair had many silver threads in it, her face was thin and haggard, and she seemed nervous and absent-minded. She asked Emma twice if she took milk and sugar, and although she answered in the affirmative, Agatha handed her an unsweetened cup of tea. Emma observed that her hand was shaking slightly.

"Shall I ask her now?" thought Emma. "Shall I say 'How's David?' in a casual manner? Why shouldn't I?" It was absurd, but she found herself unable to pronounce his name. She made several attempts, but at the last moment her courage failed her every time. "I mustn't start, or flinch, or do anything stupid when Agatha speaks about him," she told herself warningly. At last Agatha did broach the subject.

"I wrote and told you I was going to be alone, Emma dear," she began, "but I find Fate has

taken the cards out of my hand. I have just had a wire from David, who was staying with the Gordons, in Norfolk, saying he is returning to-night, quite unexpectedly. I hope you don't mind?"

She seemed so genuinely distressed that the sight of her embarrassment helped Emma to conquer her own.

"Of course I don't mind," she replied politely, but inwardly, "What did she mean by saying that Fate had taken the cards out of her hand?" she wondered, and then she abandoned herself to a confusion of thoughts in which dread and nervousness fought against pride and common sense, and joy was mingled with apprehension, whilst the wish that she had never accepted Agatha's invitation strove to overcome her longing to see David again.

"I wanted to talk to you about David," said Agatha shyly, and Emma felt her face flaming. "He asked me to write to you, but I felt it would be easier to talk to you, and also, I did write you one letter and sent it to your mother, asking her to forward it, but it was returned to me from Venice, so I concluded you must be moving about from place to place too quickly for letters to follow you. David wants me to tell you that he wants you to go on living at Cranford. He

hasn't been near the place ever since—you know, and he begged me to ask you to go back there. He says that if your little baby son had lived——” Agatha's eyes filled with tears and she continued with difficulty, “you wouldn't have had to leave it, and he wants you to know that he will never have any pleasure there himself, and that he wants you to go on living there.”

Emma was moved out of her artificial composure.

“Oh no, no!” she cried, “it wouldn't be possible! How sweet of him—how kind and dear of him! But oh! I couldn't! And what happiness could I ever find at Cranford, with the ghosts of my dead husband and my dead baby?”

She walked over to the window, struggling with her tears, and stood with her back to Agatha.

“Emma?” spoke Agatha's gentle voice. “There is something else I want to say to you. Something more about David.”

Emma swung round apprehensively.

“Come and sit beside me, dear,” beseeched Agatha, “and don't be angry with me for what I'm going to say.”

Emma obeyed her.

“Are you in love with David?” asked Agatha softly, and Emma was so taken aback by the

question that her face and neck flamed, her eyes fell, and her whole attitude was an answer in itself.

“Oh, Emma! I don’t know what there was between you both before Dick died, and I don’t intend to ask, but I do know that David is very much in love with you now, and if you love him in return you must tell him so. He’s too proud to ask you again!”

Emma stared at her in astonishment.

“And what about my pride?” she exclaimed reproachfully.

Agatha tossed her head scornfully.

“Are you so petty that you think of your pride after all the harm you’ve done? Oh, Emma, if I thought you had just been amusing yourself at his expense, flirting with him for your own amusement, I think I’d hate you! But I know instinctively that you are in love with him!”

“Why do you say I’ve done him harm?” faltered Emma, in self-defence.

“Because he’s entirely changed. He’s got no ambition now—he doesn’t care what people think about him—oh, I know I’m partly to blame, because I spoilt him—I brought him up to expect he ought to get everything he wants—I gave in to him about every mortal thing, and now I’m being punished! I always said to myself that if

he died I could bear it somehow, but that if he ever came to me and told me his life wasn't all he had expected—that he wasn't happy—that things were spoilt for him—I would far rather he had died, when he was so ill, as a baby! I started worrying over him just about the time of your marriage to Dick. He began to slack at Oxford—he threw away his chances of getting a blue—he treated his old friends extremely casually, and took up with a noisy, silly, extravagant set. He didn't do a stroke of work, and he ended by being sent down last year. David! who ought to have done so well at the 'Varsity. Now, the only things he cares about are betting and gambling and driving at an incredible speed in a racing car! He has turned into the type of boy I always prayed my son would never be—a lazy, selfish, brainless, extravagant young man, who smokes far too many cigarettes a day and drinks too many whiskies - and - sodas. And lately—I don't want to tell you how—but I've discovered he is still passionately in love with you, and oh, Emma! it's up to you to save him!"

"Do you want me to marry him?" asked Emma, with wide-open eyes.

"Yes. He loves you."

"But I'm older than he is. I've been married before. And think, oh, just think of what every-

one would say!" protested Emma, covering her burning face with her hands.

"If you love each other, what does anything else matter?"

"Oh, you don't realize—you can't understand! The things people will say about me! And he may not care for me any more—I can't go to ask him to marry me. How can I? Think how humiliating!"

She broke off, scarlet-cheeked and trembling, as the door was flung open and David burst into the room in his leather motoring clothes.

When he saw Emma he stopped dead in the doorway. Then he came forward politely and shook hands with her.

"My darling boy!" cried his mother, kissing him, and helping to take off his leather coat. "Why are you back so soon?"

David threw himself into an arm-chair and fell on a buttered scone.

"I'd forgotten I was racing at Brooklands to-morrow," he said, with his mouth full.

"Racing? In that horrible, dangerous little car?" cried Agatha. "Oh, I wish you wouldn't, darling! You'll smash yourself up, I know you will!"

He only laughed and embarked on another scone.

"I'm awfully hungry! Came down from Norfolk under an hour and a half! Pretty good, don't you think?"

Agatha shot a triumphant glance at Emma, as if to say, "There! what did I tell you? You see I wasn't exaggerating!"

Emma got up, and said she was going to rest after her journey.

"I'm dining out, by the by, Mum," said David, with somewhat unnecessary abruptness. "I'm going with a party to the Palladium."

"The Spink Sisters!" said Emma, laughing in the doorway.

"Yes," returned David. "Dick Rigby, who's giving the party, is simply mad about them. It's the first night of 'Some Scrum.'"

As Emma went upstairs, she sneered at herself for being so much in love with him that she was actually jealous of Tootsie and Looloo Spink!

She and Agatha dined alone, and all the evening they discussed Angela Lumley's engagement to Hughie Trevor.

"They've known each other such a long time, and they both seem so—so sexless, don't they?" commented Emma; and Agatha agreed with her, but said she thought they had always been devoted to each other and that money difficulties had been

in the way, lately removed by the convenient decease of Hughie's uncle, to whom he was sole heir.

"It's often difficult to see what attracts two people to one another," observed Emma pensively, and looking up, she caught Agatha's amused glance, and she blushed.

They never mentioned David's name the whole evening; but when Agatha started to yawn, about eleven o'clock, she carelessly suggested that Emma might like to sit up a little longer. There was a note of entreaty in her voice which Emma felt herself unable to resist.

"Come in to see me, on your way upstairs, to say good-night," said Agatha, looking into her eyes with a yearning intensity. And Emma hugged her silently.

She sat staring into the fire. She saw herself as a very romantic figure, about to sacrifice her womanly pride to save the soul of the man she loved. The curtain had risen upon Emma, with the stage to herself, sitting at the fireside, waiting for the great scene of her immolation. She was filled with a deep, great patience, born of self-satisfaction. Another hour ticked itself round the face of the clock, and she was still sitting there, with her hands folded in her lap, her breast rising and falling gently with her quiet, even breathing.

Presently she heard a taxi drive up, outside, and the front-door unlatch. Then she heard it bang to and David's footstep coming upstairs. He paused outside the door, slightly ajar, and Emma held her breath, terrified that he was going upstairs to bed. But he pushed it open.

"Hullo! Still sitting up?" he exclaimed, in evident embarrassment.

"I wanted to speak to you," answered Emma quietly.

David went over to the little table between the windows, where there was a tray of drinks, and helped himself to a whisky-and-soda. He came towards the fire and sat down opposite her. Emma stared down at the soft pink palms of her hands.

"I want to thank you for your very kind, sweet thought—your chivalrous suggestion that I should go on living at Cranford," she said, in a voice that trembled a little. "I can't thank you enough, but I must refuse. Cranford belongs to you, and I could never feel happy living there."

David made no reply. He looked thoughtfully at his glass, a darker brown than it should have been, gleaming in the firelight. Emma dismissed the subject.

"How were the Spink Sisters?" she asked, with a quick change of tone.

"Oh, just the same as usual," answered David rather irritably. "Raucous-voiced, painted, vulgar women! They bore me!"

He stretched his arms above his head and yawned voluptuously. His rudeness irritated Emma, even while it provoked in her a longing to hear him make love to her.

"Are you really going to race at Brooklands to-morrow?" she asked.

"Yes, why?"

"Isn't it very dangerous?"

"What if it is? I like it being dangerous!"

There was something of the little boy showing off in his tones, and Emma smiled inwardly.

"That's very selfish of you," she said.

"Why selfish?" he demanded rather crossly.

"Because of your mother for one thing, and because of Cranford for another. If you go and kill yourself now, Cranford passes out of the family altogether."

David shrugged his shoulders. "But when I die, it will do that anyway," he said carelessly.

"Oh, no. It will go to your children," said Emma, with emphasis.

David tossed off his whisky-and-soda. "I'm

never going to marry," he said in a hard, scornful voice, and Emma felt suddenly embarrassed.

She went on her knees and began poking the fire violently.

"It's awfully cold for April," she observed tritely, and David rose and took the poker out of her hand.

"You'd better let me do that," he said, kneeling down beside her.

So absent-minded were they that it never occurred to either of them that it was useless to poke the fire, as they were so soon leaving the room, and David seized the coal-scuttle and began hurling on coals; action in some way relieved his feelings. Then he fell to using the poker again. Emma, still on her knees, watched him silently, drinking in every detail of him. Then, as if aware of her presence for the first time, he turned, and found her great, soft blue eyes fixed on him. He dropped the poker with a crash and suddenly buried his face in her lap. Emma kissed the back of his head passionately, again and again.

"My darling—my precious—my own!" she whispered incoherently.

Expressions she had never before made use of came crowding on her lips, and tears of joy

stole down her cheeks and dropped on to his hair.

"Oh, Emma! I've been so miserable without you!" murmured David. "I want you so terribly—terribly—terribly!"

* * * * *

They went in, together, to say good-night to Agatha, looking very young, with her hair in two plaits and her white arms, bare to the elbows, lying outside on the sheets, and she stared at bright-eyed Emma wistfully. This was not the daughter-in-law she would have chosen—no, no, not by a long way!—but David had wanted her, and she had sworn to herself that he should have her. She kissed them both triumphantly. David looked so happy, bless him! and after all, Emma had a lovely figure, and a skin like a baby's, and no one need ever know she was twenty-seven. Then she sighed, and her thoughts flew back along the years to the night she got engaged to David's father.

"How soon it all passes!" she said, to herself. "Look at Emma, so radiant, so young, and so adored, to-night, and yourself, faded and tired, looking on! She is the important one, the one who takes all; and you are the one who doesn't

count, the one who gives. But in twenty-five years' time, Emma, too, will be giving, she, too, will be tired and faded and unimportant, and her happiness will be to give. It's the Law of the World."

CHAPTER XXVII

THE GRAND HOTEL,
SMALLBOROUGH-ON-SEA,
KENT.

April 23rd.

DEAREST FATHER,

I was married very quietly yesterday morning to David Cranford. I am very happy, and we are spending our honeymoon down here, as this is where we first met. My golf is improving. I did the 17th hole in two, to-day, which is very good, even for a man.

With love,
Your ever affec. daughter,
EMMA.

P.S. Please break the news to Mother. I don't dare.

THE NEST,
CROWBRIDGE,
DEVON.

April 24th.

MY DEAR EMMA,

You lack subtlety, but at least you know how to get what you want. Your mother is horrified at the news, and tells me the unfortunate

lad is no older than fourteen. However, perhaps his extreme youth is all the more conducive to happiness in your married life, for you have always hated old people, and a husband fourteen years younger than yourself will, at least, escape the cruel accusation of old age which you would most certainly level at the hoary head of a husband even two years your senior.

With love from your affectionate Father.

P.S. I do not credit your statement that you did the 17th hole on the Smallborough links in two.

EATON SQUARE,
S.W.1.

April 26th.

DARLING PRISCILLA,

What do you think about Emma and David? I'm *too* thrilled for words. Hughie pretends that he has known all along that they were in love with one another, but I think he is merely showing off! He swears that David was mad about her even before she married poor dear Dick. Isn't it too exciting, though? I think they'll be an adorable couple, because although Emma is the eldest in actual years, yet she is

absurdly young in lots of ways, and they'll always amuse one another, and laugh at each other's silliest jokes ! That pig, Cynthia Lovitt, is being *too* offensive about Emma, and says she only married Dick for what he could give her, and that if the baby had lived, and David hadn't become Lord Cranford, she'd never have looked at him. She says she's going to cut Emma in future. Even Sadie Benjamin is going about with a shocked face, and says she thinks 'dear Emma is liable to be misunderstood, and is laying herself open to unkind criticism.' She quite obviously thinks Emma isn't the least in love with David, and says she thinks it's a terrible mistake for a woman to marry a man five years younger than herself; but I got one back on her by saying I thought it was no worse than marrying a man thirty years her senior (which is what Sadie did !) and she didn't like it at all, and retaliated by asking me, sweetly, whether Emma wasn't the best judge of that, having experienced both kinds of connubial bliss ! I met Gordon Hereford yesterday, and he smiled in that horribly cynical way of his when I told him the news, and observed that Emma was even cleverer than he had suspected, that her talents were entirely wasted on the stage, and that the rôle of professional countess suited her to perfection ! In fact, London is

being loathsome about the marriage, and it makes me too furious, for poor darling Emma's sake.

With best love,
ANGELA.

SOUTHLANDS,
NR. BATH,
GLOUCESTERSHIRE.
April 28th.

DARLING ANGELA,

Don't worry about Emma! Whatever people may say about the marriage, you bet your life they'll come cringing to the very first party Emma chooses to give, and I daresay she still stands a good chance of getting asked to a third-class party at Cynthia Lovitt's in spite of all that sweet woman's catty remarks. Cynthia has never yet 'cut' a Countess, and isn't likely to begin now!

Personally, Tony and I are delighted about it. Emma is far too attractive to live alone, and David has always been madly in love with her, and it's lovely to think she hasn't got to give up the Cranford pearls, and that we shall still get asked to all the big shoots at Cranford! I've

invited her and David down for the Races next week; would you and Hughie care to come, too?

Best love,

Yrs.,

PRISCILLA.

P.S. What a bad photograph of poor darling Emma in the *Pratler* this week!

THE GRAND HOTEL,
SMALLBOROUGH-ON-SEA,
KENT.

DARLING MOTHER, }
DARLING AGATHA, }

We are divinely happy. We play golf all day long, and sit in the sandhills when we are tired. It was so warm to-day that we actually bathed before lunch. Everyone in the hotel thinks we're mad. Perhaps we are. But we don't care! We return from Paradise next Monday, so you'd better start preparing the padded room.

Your loving

{ DAVID.
{ EMMA.

CONCLUSION

THERE was a long stream of cars reaching half-way round Belgrave Square, and a crowd had collected outside the house with the awning and the red carpet, watching the beautiful women step out of their cars, and sweep up the steps into the brightly-illuminated hall. Emma was standing at the top of the stairs, poised like a fairy-sprite, in clinging, diaphanous, white draperies, with a bunch of deep red roses pinned against her bosom, to show off the whiteness of her skin. Her eyes were shining, her whole being radiated magnetism and happiness.

“Darling Emma! How lovely you look!” murmured Cynthia Lovitt, fondly pressing her white-gloved hand, and smiling into Emma’s face, before she swept on into the ball-room, to cast her eagle eye round in search of celebrities.

Gordon Hereford was smiling to himself, as he followed her upstairs.

“You look wonderful, Emma!” he said, as he shook hands with her. “Love is indeed a marvellous thing!”

“Take care!” Emma warned him laughingly,

with her finger on her lips, "or you'll lose your reputation as the greatest cynic in London!"

Nicholas Durville, ill at ease, even grotesque in white waistcoat and tails, was wandering about with a far-away, dreamy smile on his face, aloof, detached from the scene, as if he felt he had no business to be there at all.

"So you have invited all London to come and sneer at you!" he observed in Emma's ear, unable to resist the longing to cast a cloud over her radiant countenance.

"Why should they sneer? — because I'm happy?" she shot back at him, in undertones.

The Benjamins were coming upstairs.

"My dear, dear Emma!" cried Sadie plucking at her dress, and kissing her tenderly. "How lovely you look! and what a perfect dress!"

"You look like a fairy spirit!" observed Benjy, casting toadlike eyes of covetous admiration over her person. "You are a very lucky man!" he added, turning to David and wagging his fat forefinger in his face.

"They say all that to your face," said Mr. Durville, "out of common courtesy and natural greed, for they obviously expect a good supper. But surely you can't be so foolish as to imagine for one moment that they'll be so pleasant behind your back?"

01

"Emma!" whispered David, touching her elbow. "Will you promise not to dance with anyone but me?"

"You silly angelic darling! Of course I can't promise anything so absurd, but you shall have the first dance, anyway!"

Nicholas Durville watched them both curiously, then, as David moved away:

"D'you remember that much-coveted Persian kitten I gave you on your sixth birthday?" he murmured, smiling into space. "Such a sweet little thing! How devoted you were to it, too, playing with it, petting it, never leaving it alone, until at the end of three weeks you were sick of the sight of it. Then, while you were racking your brains to find some means of disposing of it, the poor animal fortunately died. It was a happy release. A piece of good fortune which seldom occurs." He looked at her meditatively. "I shouldn't care to be your white elephant, Emma," he added, with a shudder.

"Are you trying to make epigrams, father?" asked Emma, a little coldly.

"Not a single one, my dear, but I will if you like. It is a far, far better thing to desire the unattainable than to attain the undesirable."

"Very neat, but I don't believe it makes sense.

And, please, what do you refer to as the 'undesirable'?"

"In your case, anything in your possession which doesn't rightfully belong to someone else," said Mr. Durville.

"My dear father——(How nice to see you, dear Lady Lumley! Angela, darling, how are you?) You're getting rather disagreeable. It's nearly midnight—long past your usual bedtime. Don't you think you'd better go home?" He read his dismissal in the light kiss which she imprinted on his cheek.

"I will take the subtle hint," he said, "and leave you with one word of fatherly advice. Remember, the difference between your ages is not to your advantage, and your ever-increasing tendency towards a double chin should be a daily warning to you never to give your husband the chance of seeing you as you really are. Good-night, my dear child."

David gazed blankly after Mr. Durville's retreating form.

"What's the matter with your father?" he inquired. "What was he babbling about? Is he always like that?"

"He can't help it," answered Emma, her eyes rather troubled, her under lip protruding sulkily.

David was staring at her with the look she loved to see in his narrowed eyes.

"You do look wonderful to-night, Emma!" he whispered suddenly.

The cloud lifted from her face. She flushed with pleasure, and her eyes shone as she eagerly drank in more and more compliments showered upon her by the stream of chattering guests. Her head whirled; she was intoxicated with her own success.

* * * * *

"What a lot of people!" murmured Mrs. Durville sleepily, in the taxi, going home. "Really, Emma must know everybody in London! And how nice the child looked, didn't she? She's a good hostess—I thought the supper was very well done. She looks very happy, doesn't she, Nicholas? And so she ought to be, for I'm sure she's got everything she wants!"

"Emma," observed Nicholas Durville thoughtfully, with the street-lights flickering across his face, "is the Lord's pet. . . ."

The Novel of the Year

THE HEAD OF THE HOUSE OF COOMBE

By *Frances Hodgson Burnett*

Author of "The Shuttle," "The Secret Garden," "Little Lord Fauntleroy," etc. 7s. 6d. net

Mrs. Hodgson Burnett has not given us a book for several years, and now she returns with one that is true romance.

THE HEIR

By *V. Sackville-West*

Author of "Heritage." 6s. net

Five tales not connected in subject, but linked together by that creative impulse which is the common inspiration of them all—an impulse investing all events with the beauty of emotional experience.

THE PYRAMID

By *Warrington Dawson*

Author of "The Gift of Paul Clermont." 7s. 6d.

The story of a singer, George Alayn, descendant of troubadours—of his boyhood, his struggles, his love, and his rise to fame.

THE HOLY TREE

By *Gerald O'Donovan*

Author of "Vocations." 7s. 6d. net

A lyrical, idyllic tale, beautifully told.

BILL THE BACHELOR

By *Denis Mackail*

Author of "Romance to the Rescue," etc. 7s. 6d.

An astonishingly clever book, written in an amusing vein by one of the few really humorous writers of the day.

COASTS OF ROMANCE

By *Crosbie Garstin*

"Patlander" of "Punch," author of "The Ballad of the 'Royal Ann.'" 7s. 6d.

The story of a light-hearted journeying about the lesser-known parts of Morocco and the romantic land of Spain, decorated with the author's own black-and-white drawings.

CAREER

By *Lady Kennard*

Author of "A Roumanian Diary." 7s. 6d.

This tale of diplomatic and social life on the Bosphorus a certain number of years ago has all the exciting elements of the "spy" story and at the same time strong local colour.

OVERLOOKED

A gem of beautiful workmanship.

By *Maurice Baring*

7s. 6d.

CAPTIVITY

Author of "Margaret Protests."

The story of how a woman saved the soul of a man.

By *Leonora M. Eyles*

7s. 6d.

THE CLASH

Author of "The Happy Highways," etc.

A stimulating book of breathless vitality.

By *Storm Jameson*

7s. 6d.

A LOVE CONFERENCE

A woman's love affair seen obliquely by her narrative to a friend.

By *Mrs. Arthur Harter*

7s. 6d.

JADE AND OTHER STORIES

Grim and fascinating stories of Chinatown.

By *Hugh Wiley*

6s.

BRUSHWOOD

A new aspect of the problem of woman's right to the fuller life.

By *Kathleen Barrow*

7s. 6d.

THE GREAT QUEST

A tale of adventure on the high seas, for all to read. Exciting in the extreme.

By *C. Beardman Hawes*

7s. 6d.

SECRET HARVEST

The story of a losing struggle against a dreaded family secret.

By *Dorothy Percival*

7s. 6d.

THE LAY ANTHONY

This is the first novel Mr. Hergesheimer ever wrote, but it is now published for the first time in England. and has been revised by the author. Its subject is the height to which a great love will raise the most ordinary and mundane minded, as shown in the life of the boy Tony Ball.

By *Joseph Hergesheimer*

7s. 6d. net

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

The volume contains five stories, of which the longest, "The Inn," takes rank with the finest of Turgenev's tales of peasant life under serfdom.

By *Ivan Turgenev*

Cloth 4s., leather 6s. net.

"Knock Knock Knock" completes the series of Turgenev's novels, translated by CONSTANCE GARNETT.

